

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
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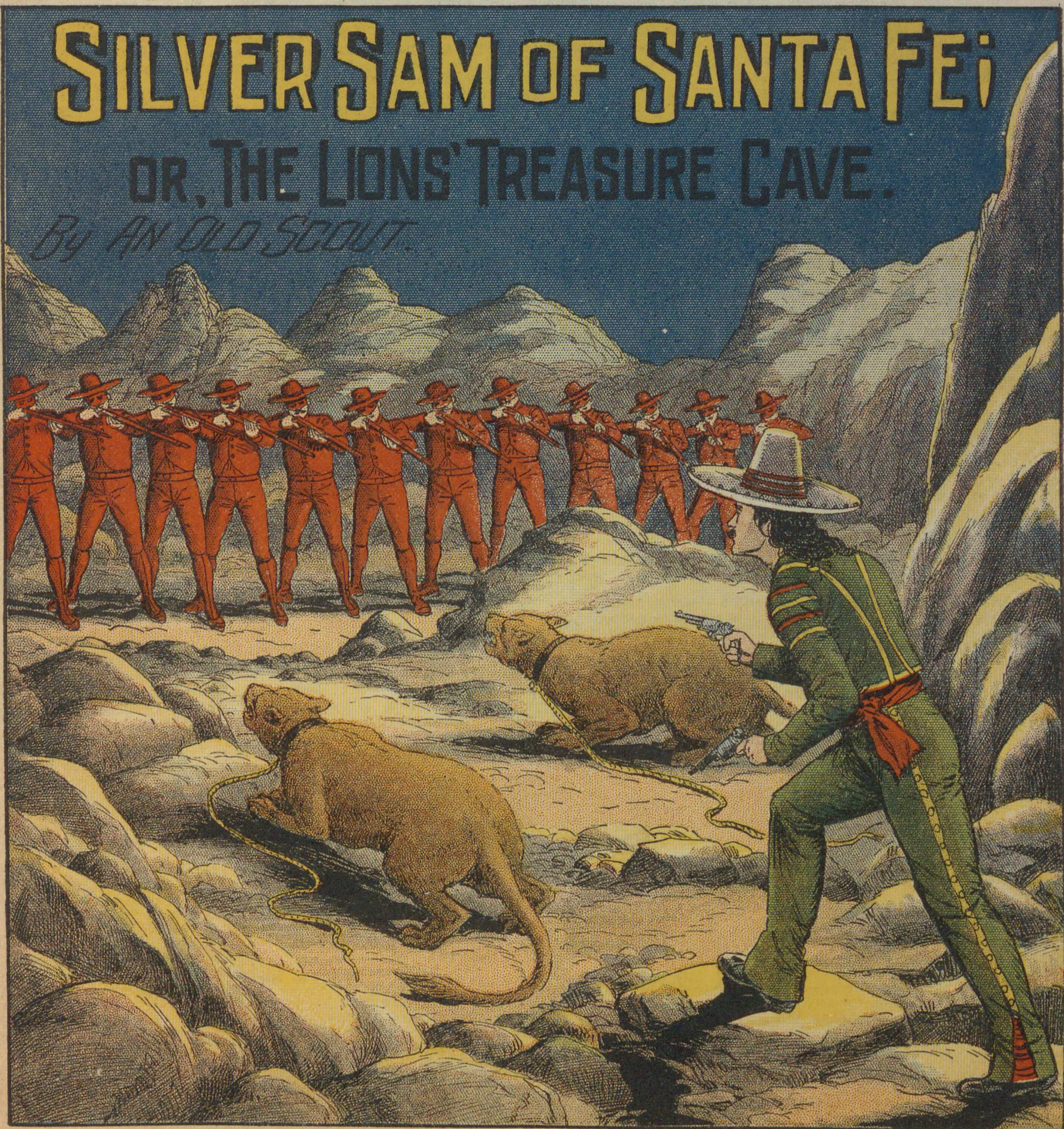
NEW YORK, JUNE 3, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

SILVER SAM OF SANTA FE!

OR, THE LIONS' TREASURE CAVE.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



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NEW YORK, JUNE 3, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

Silver Sam of Santa Fe;

OR,

THE LIONS' TREASURE CAVE.

BY AN OLD SCOUT.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNKNOWN ENEMY.

The civil war was raging furiously in the Southern states, and throughout the great southwest were scattered many regiments. Their duties consisted in guarding that part of the country during the great rebellion, and in protecting the settlers from the warlike and bloodthirsty Apaches, Comanches, and other equally unpleasant and treacherous Indian tribes.

Sante Fe was at that time a place of some importance, for it was the headquarters of the army in that section of the country, as well as the natural resort for adventurers of all kinds, from the border outlaw and common rough to the genteel-looking card sharper.

It was evening, and one of the pleasantest days in the month of October had just drawn to a close when our story opens.

The doors and windows of the Golden Buck—the largest and most elegant of the Sante Fe saloons—were ablaze with light.

Inside was the motley crowd so common to public resorts in the far west at that time, for the reader must remember that the incidents of this story took place nearly forty years ago.

There were roulette tables, faro tables and poker tables in full swing, as the many victims of the passion for gambling leaned eagerly forward to watch for the result of a bet.

At one table, which was rather retired, for it stood in the corner at some distance from the others, a man was seated alone; and any one observing him might have noticed that he was gazing with all the intensity of his fierce black eyes upon a group of army officers who were engaged in emptying a bottle of wine over the bar.

Not once did he remove his gaze, nor did he stir until the officers had completed their congenial task, and were engaged in lighting their cigars.

Then he arose and stepped hastily forward.

He drew near to the officers and touched one of them lightly on the arm, so that he turned quickly to see who it was

that had thus unceremoniously withdrawn his attention from his friends.

"Am I addressing Lieutenant Colonel Harrison?" asked the stranger.

"That's my name," replied the officer. "What can I do for you?"

"Are you aware that your life is in danger?"

"Yes, sir," replied Colonel Harrison. "A soldier's life is always in danger."

"I mean that your life is sought by an unknown enemy," retorted the stranger, calmly.

The colonel shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"Is that all, sir?" he said, turning partly away. "Your intention is evidently good, and I thank you for the warning. But your fears are groundless. I am happy to say that I do not believe I have an enemy in the world—that is, a personal enemy."

"But you have, colonel—one."

"Whom? Do you know the name of this interesting person?"

"I do."

"What is it?"

The stranger was about to reply. He had parted his lips to utter the name for which the colonel had asked, and the words were about to be spoken, when there came a sudden interruption.

A third person stepped quickly between the officer and the stranger. He had approached so quietly that neither of them had noticed him.

He uttered no word by which to explain his conduct, but the effect which his sudden and unlooked for coming had upon the stranger who had endeavored to warn the colonel, was surprising.

"Silver Sam!" he cried, staggering back and turning livid with consternation. "Silver Sam! Curse you!"

With a lightning-like movement, he drew a six-shooter from his bootleg, and before any one could prevent it there came two sharp reports.

"Take that—take that!" he cried, and then with a wild shout he turned, and leaping like a panther through one of

the groups of gamblers, the next instant he had thrown himself bodily out of one of the windows, carrying sash and all with him.

Confusion reigned supreme in the saloon.

Two or three men darted from the doorway in pursuit of the daring stranger, while the others rushed forward to the spot where Colonel Harrison was stretched at full length upon the floor.

Bending over the silent form of the stricken army officer was another stranger—a face which nobody recognized, and the excited crowd instantly jumped to the conclusion that he and the man who had fired the two shots were friends and accomplices.

"He's his pard!" cried one, not very intelligibly, yet all understood.

"Down with him!"

"String him up!"

"His pard has laid out the colonel."

"Six feet o' rope! Down with him!"

Such were the shouts that filled the room, and the angry, excited mob rushed forward en masse to carry out this threat without delay.

The stranger, upon whom the crowd seemed as with one voice to vent their thirst for vengeance, turned calmly and faced them.

In each hand he held a gleaming, silver-mounted revolver.

There was no expression of fear in his face, although for an instant it seemed as though nothing earthly could have saved him from the fury of the mob.

"Stop!" he said, coolly, but distinctly, "for I will kill the first man who attempts to interfere with me.

"Instead of wishing to harm the colonel, I came here to save his life, and I have succeeded. Did you not hear two shots? One was meant for me—see!"

He removed his white sombrero and pointed to a hole in the crown.

"The other," he said, replacing the hat upon his head, "has grazed the colonel's temple. He will revive in a moment if you will stand back so that he can get some air."

Without deigning to notice the effect of his explanation, he lowered his weapons, and turning his back upon the crowd, once more bent over the prostrate man.

He was right. The colonel was reviving.

The bullet had grazed his temple, giving him a severe shock and causing the blood to flow a little; but the wound was only a scratch, and except for a headache, the officer was, in a few moments, as well as ever.

"You are better, sir," said the stranger. "I am glad that I came in time, for that fellow would have killed you."

The colonel looked sharply at him, nor could he avoid feeling a slight suspicion regarding the mysterious stranger who had arrived so opportunely.

He saw before him a compactly built youth, who, judging from his face, was scarcely past his teens. His dress was rich, almost to gaudiness. It was made of tanned buckskin, cut in the Mexican fashion, and profusely trimmed with silver braid and fringe.

His sombrero, except for the trimming, was as white as snow, a long plume of the same colorless hue falling gracefully over one side of the brim.

But the colonel, when he looked into the stranger's bold, black eyes and fearless countenance, felt his suspicions all vanish like mist before the sun. It was a handsome face at which he gazed, and one which at once inspired confidence and trust.

He extended his hand cordially.

"I am greatly your debtor, sir," he said. "May I ask your name?"

"I am called Silver Sam, colonel," replied the stranger, with a bow.

"But that is not a name——"

"It is the only one by which I care to be known, sir," interrupted Sam.

"Pardon me," exclaimed the colonel, "are you a stranger here?"

"I have only just arrived."

"Do you know the man who tried to shoot us? He attempted to kill us both, did he not?"

"Yes, but he did not know that I was here."

"Ah, he knows you, then. In fact, I heard him call you by name. Do you know him?"

"I do, most certainly."

"Who is he?"

"A desperado—an outlaw."

"I can well believe that. What is his name?"

"He calls himself Captain Flash."

The colonel started.

"Captain Flash!" he said, slowly, and speaking to himself, though in a tone which his companions could plainly hear. "I have heard that name before somewhere. Ah! I remember now. I received a note last spring while I was in California warning me that a man by that name sought my life."

"Exactly."

"I have not thought of it from that time until now. In fact, I scarcely gave it a thought then."

"But you now realize the value of the warning, do you not?"

"Yes, but I fail to understand why any one should seek to kill me."

"It is true, nevertheless."

"Who could have sent the warning letter to me?"

"It was I, colonel."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Then you know why this man wishes to kill me?"

"No, I only know that he does seek your life."

"What is he—a road agent?"

"Yes, in part. He has a band of followers that are as unscrupulous as he."

"But why should you come all this distance to save my life?"

"I did not. I came to find Captain Flash."

"It is strange," muttered the colonel, "but when you interrupted us, he was telling me that my life was in danger; in fact, he was warning me against some unknown enemy."

"And the shot from his revolver which came so near killing you must have told you who that enemy is. I am glad that you escaped, colonel. Good-night."

Silver Sam turned, and in a moment more was hurrying through the dark street toward the outskirts of the town.

He had gone but a short distance, however, when his quick ear caught a sound which it instantly recognized.

At the same instant there came a flash and a sharp report from one side, and Silver Sam fell forward upon his face with a heavy crash.

CHAPTER II.

TRACKED BY LIONS.

Following the flash and report, before which Silver Sam had sunk to the ground seemingly killed, the figure of a man sprang from its hiding place and walked hurriedly away.

But no sooner was the man's back turned than Sam leaped nimbly to his feet.

The bullet had not touched him.

His quick ear had recognized the click of the hammer when the weapon was cocked, and realizing that in the very next instant a bullet would be fired at him, he had thrown himself forward on his face just in time to escape it, so that the missile had passed harmlessly over him.

"A close shave, my friend," he muttered, "and but for the fact that I was on the lookout for you, I should have caught it that time. As it is, you think me dead, my noble captain. Well, I will allow you to think so for a few hours."

He turned and retraced his steps, and at last went by another street to the outskirts of the town where he had left his horse.

In a very few moments he was mounted and dashing away over the plains toward the mountain, which, during daylight appeared to be but a few miles away.

The darkness was intense, for the night had grown cloudy, but the horse seemed to know the trail over which he was expected to travel, and went on his way rapidly.

They reached the mountain slope, and began following a narrow path which, after ascending a short distance, led into a narrow canyon, where the darkness was complete. Our hero had traversed this nearly a quarter of a mile when he suddenly came to a halt, and putting one hand to his mouth, gave a peculiar call.

Almost immediately it was answered from a point directly over his head, and then a light appeared.

"Good!" muttered Sam. "She is on the watch. She always is when I am away."

Dismounting, he led his horse into a grotto in the cliff before which an adobe wall had been built, thus making a warm and safe stable.

Then, closing the door behind him, he passed on through the grotto to a narrow passage where, for a short distance, he was obliged to resort to his hands and knees as a mode of traveling.

But presently he was again upon his feet, and in another moment he had thrust aside a heavy curtain made of bearskins, and stepped into a lighted chamber.

Instantly two huge animals which had been lying upon the rocky floor leaped to their feet and fawned upon him.

"Ho, Brutus!" replied Sam, patting one of them fondly upon its head. "And you, Cassius," seizing the other by its extended paw, "you are always ready to welcome me."

They were a pair of huge mountain lions, fierce and almost untamable by nature, and yet they plainly showed by every sign of which they were capable that they loved and trusted Silver Sam.

At that moment another bearskin curtain was thrust aside, and a beautiful girl entered from a chamber further on.

"Hello, little sister!" cried Sam joyfully springing forward. "On the watch for me, as usual, eh?"

He was about to clasp her in his arms, when he detected a look of great anxiety upon her face.

"What is it, little sister?" he said, pausing suddenly.

"Danger," she replied, calmly. "I was afraid you would not come."

"Tell me all about it!" said Sam, simply. "What is there to fear?"

"I do not know," replied his sister, anxiously, "and that is what made me afraid. This afternoon I went down into the canyon for a walk, taking Brutus and Cassius with me."

"Well?"

"We had no sooner entered the stable than they began to act strangely, and I saw them smelling at an object on the floor. I stooped to examine it and found this."

The object which she gave him was a huge knife, painted red from its point to the end of the hilt.

Sam examined it critically, but there was no mark upon it save the daub of red paint.

"Some one has been here," he muttered, "and that, too, since I left you the day before yesterday. But who?"

"I thought our hiding place secure," murmured the girl. "Ay, and so it is, Ilda," replied Sam. "Who could find us here?"

"Somebody has found us, and that knife has been left as a warning. Oh, my brother, let us give up this quest and go back again to our home."

Sam looked up quickly, and there was a frown upon his face.

"Hush, Ilda," he said, somewhat coldly, "you should be the last one to advise that. No; we are on the track now, and the scent grows warm. With Brutus and Cassius and your revolvers, which you know so well how to use, you have naught to fear."

The girl drew herself up proudly.

"You know that it is not for myself I fear," she replied, "but for you, who are constantly in danger. How many times have you narrowly escaped death at the hands of your enemy?"

Sam smiled grimly.

"I have ceased to count them," he replied. "Come, Ilda, no more foolish talk of this kind. We came into this region for a purpose, and until it is accomplished there shall be no turning back."

He looked stern and cold, as well as several years older when he spoke thus, and Ilda sighed and turned away.

"Brutus—Cassius!" called Sam authoritatively, and the two huge animals which had stretched themselves at his feet after receiving his caresses, were up in an instant, as docile and as obedient as well-trained dogs.

He laid the red knife upon the floor in front of them and pointed at it.

They seemed to comprehend, for they at once began to purr softly in concert.

"Are you going out again to-night?" asked Ilda, anxiously, as she watched these maneuvers.

"Yes," replied Sam. "This knife bothers me. I will take the lions and be back at dawn."

It seemed as though the animals understood his words, for they sprang to the bearskin curtain and crouched there, waiting for him.

Silver Sam paused long enough to clasp the girl in his embrace.

"My brave little sister," he said, fondly, "I am taking your brave defenders away from you, and while we are gone you must remain in your own chamber. No one can find you there, no matter how carefully they search. Listen—I have seen my enemy to-day—to-night, in fact. The knife may be a bit of his work, and if it is I want to know it. If the trail is warm enough, Brutus and Cassius will track him down."

"But they would kill him!" faltered Ilda, "and that would be worse than all, for then——"

"They will obey me," interrupted Sam, gazing fondly, yet sternly at his pets. "They have never refused yet, and will not now. Go to your own chamber, Ilda, until I return."

So saying, he was gone, and at his heels crept the lions.

In the stable he paused long enough to put a leash upon each one of them, and then, grasping the lariat tightly in his left hand, he again allowed them to smell of the red knife.

Brutus growled fiercely, and then with one bound sprang to the door.

Sam opened it hastily and allowed them to pass out in front of him.

Still holding the lariat tightly in his hand, he closed the door.

The huge animals were impatient to be off, and at once

started away along the dark canyon, where the blackness was so intense that Sam could not see his hand before his face.

But he knew that wheresoever the lions led him, the man whom they were tracking had gone before, and he argued that where another could go he could.

Suddenly our hero felt that he was being led into a narrow fissure in the rocks, which at first amounted to but little more than a crevice, but presently it grew wider, until at last, much to his surprise, after toiling up a steep ascent, he came out into an open space.

Although it was still very dark, the natural light of the sky rendered it possible for him to see quite well.

Wonderingly he realized that the lions had led him into a natural basin in the mountains; a basin hollowed out of the rock and earth by the hand of nature.

It was entirely surrounded by high and frowning cliffs, so precipitous that Silver Sam at once reasoned that there could be no means of ingress and egress save that narrow fissure through which he had come.

In an instant his mind was made up.

The lions had tracked his man there, and he must be there still.

With a lion on either side of him, our hero took up his position at the mouth of the narrow fissure, and waited for daylight to appear.

CHAPTER III.

THE RED GIANT.

It was the first time that Silver Sam had ever left Ilda alone without her trusty lions to keep guard over her.

True, he had told her to seek her own chamber and to remain there, for he knew that she would be perfectly safe in that retreat.

The cavern which they inhabited was one which Silver Sam had found when in that region two years before, and he had fitted it up and made it his headquarters then.

When fate took him there again, and it became necessary for his sister to accompany him, he could think of no place where she could be so entirely safe from all kinds of harm, as in the cavern.

But was it a cavern?

Silver Sam was by no means sure of that. There were many signs that led him to believe that it had once been a mine, and that the band of men had fashioned these corridors and chambers and so cleverly concealed the entrance to it all.

He was mineralogist enough to know that whether it was a cavern or mine, it contained the richest vein of pure silver that he had ever seen or heard of.

The vein was so rich that with the aid of a pick he could secure large pieces of the pure metal with very little exertion, and he realized that when the necessity for his present undertaking was past, he could easily mine enough of the riches of the cavern, alone and unaided, except by his sister Ilda, to render him rich for life.

It has been said that the entrance was cleverly concealed; so cleverly, in fact, that he had but little fear that it would ever be discovered.

An accident had revealed the secret to him, and the same circumstances were not likely to occur to another.

Even the man who had dropped the huge knife in the grotto had doubtless discovered nothing except that the grotto had been used as a stable by some one whom he wished to frighten away.

The corridor which led from the grotto to the first chamber

was narrow, steep and winding. Adjoining that chamber, connected by a narrow opening, was another of about the same size, and the two were used for the cooking and living rooms, for they were each lighted from without by means of shafts cut in the face of the cliff.

The shafts were about six feet long, and large enough to creep through on the hands and knees, while at the end they opened just above a shelving rock, which served several purposes.

It was an exquisite balcony upon which Ilda was wont to sit when sewing or reading; it prevented any probability that a light within the cavern would show at night, and it afforded a safe and perfect lookout over the canyon.

Beyond the two chambers were two more, also running along parallel with the canyon, and lighted in the same way; one of them was occupied by Ilda, the other by Silver Sam, as sleeping rooms. Behind these two, dark and gloomy, was still another, which was unused.

This suite of three rooms was connected with the first two in a very peculiar manner, that is, by means of another corridor, the entrance to which could be opened and closed at will, as it was nothing more or less than a huge rock wedged in on the other side, and so perfectly balanced that Ilda's strength was sufficient to move it to and fro; while on the inner side the use of a small stone, placed in the proper position, rendered the oscillating rock as immovable as the mountain itself.

Ilda had to but pass through the door thus cleverly made, and to put the wedge in place, and a whole army of pursuers could not reach her.

Silver Sam had thought that there must be still another secret corridor, leading from the dark chamber which they did not use, but if such a thing existed, it was even better concealed than the other, for although he had searched diligently, he had never been able to find it.

When Ilda was thus left alone without her protectors, she at first thought that she would follow her brother's advice, but there was a pleasant fire burning in the chamber in which she was sitting, and she felt loth to leave it.

She placed the lamp upon a little table near the fire, and then throwing herself upon a couch of skins near her, began to read.

But the hour was late, and the fire made her drowsy, so, before she was even aware of the fact that she was sleepy, the book fell from her hands, and she slumbered.

An hour went by, and she still slept on, when the bearskin curtains were thrust cautiously aside, revealing a head and face that were truly hideous.

Seeing that all was quiet, the owner of the forbidding countenance rose to his feet, and stepped into the chamber.

He was a man of huge proportions, clad entirely in skins. His head was covered with long, unkempt hair as red as fire, while a beard of the same color almost hid his face from view.

Great round eyes which glowed like balls of fire peered from beneath his shaggy brows upon the form of the slumbering Ilda, as he strode cautiously forward, his bare feet making no noise upon the rocky floor.

In his right hand he held a huge knife, precisely like the one which Ilda had found in the grotto.

Was he about to use it on the unprotected girl sleeping so peacefully there?

Indeed, it seemed so, for he paused and bent over her gloatingly, as one who is meditating a crime.

But if he had intended to use violence, he evidently changed his mind, for presently he placed the knife carelessly across Ilda's breast, and then turned and departed as silently as he had come.

Silver Sam sat silently awaiting the coming of the dawn at the mouth of the narrow fissure, which had led him to the basin in the mountain.

Brutus and Cassius were upon either side of him, quiet also, for they seemed to realize what was expected of them.

Suddenly, however, Brutus uttered a low growl and leaped to his feet.

Cassius instantly did the same, but the growls to which the beasts gave utterance were so low that our hero scarcely heard them.

He also got upon his feet, and then, with a revolver in either hand, he waited and listened.

Not a sound reached his ear, and yet he was positive that somebody was approaching.

Both the lions stood in that attitude which they assume when prepared to leap forward upon the instant, but they remained as motionless and as silent as though cut in bronze.

Minutes flew by, until nearly a quarter of an hour had passed since Brutus growled, and yet all was still as death.

Silver Sam was about to sink into a sitting position once more, when suddenly the whole rocky basin was lighted by a sudden flash of astounding brilliancy. It lasted but a fraction of a second, and yet during it he saw a most startling sight.

Before him, and not twenty paces distant, and drawn up in perfect line were a score of armed men arrayed entirely in crimson, even to the masks which they wore upon their faces and the weapons with which they were provided.

In that one brief instant he saw it all, and then darkness fell again, more intense than ever.

Realizing that nothing but instant action could save his life, Silver Sam turned, and with one bound leaped into the fissure, making a low signal to his faithful lions as he did so.

But ere he had traversed a dozen yards he ran plump against an obstacle which effectually barred his exit by that means, and which sent him upon his back, stunned and almost senseless.

In an instant he knew that he had been trapped, that the fissure by which he had made his way there had by some means been closed after he had passed.

"Caught!" he muttered. "Trapped like a fool!"

At once his thoughts flew to his sister Ilda, and his mind was made up.

Quickly loosing the leashes from the two faithful animals, he patted them affectionately upon their heads.

"Brutus! Cassius!" he said, in a low tone, "Home with you! Find Ilda! Go, boys, go!"

Brutus was the first to obey.

With a leap that was truly marvelous, he sprang into the air, straight for the barrier before them. His eyes had the faculty of seeing in the dark, and his instinct told him that he could reach the top.

In an instant he had disappeared, but Cassius did not move.

"Go, Cassius!" ordered Silver Sam, and the faithful animal, not daring to disobey, followed after Brutus.

Silver Sam was alone in the fissure. The rock was too high for him to scale, and he felt that he was at the mercy of his enemies.

But his courage never quailed. If the moment had come when he must die he would meet it like a man.

Every sense was upon the alert. He knew that in another moment or two his enemies would declare themselves.

* * * * *

In the cavern where Ilda slept all was quiet and still.

The hideous being had laid the red knife upon her bosom, and had been gone but a moment or two when he returned, thrusting the bearskin curtain aside quickly and noisily.

At the same moment Ilda awoke and sprang to her feet.

A cry of alarm escaped her as the knife fell from her person to the floor.

She saw it and recognized it instantly.

Her mind had just grasped the situation. She had but just realized that she had been intruded upon while sleeping, and when she saw the figure of the hideous giant towering before her.

With a wild cry of fear she started back and drew a revolver from her pocket, while at the same instant the red giant leaped toward her.

She pointed the revolver at him and pulled the trigger, but no report followed; it had missed fire.

With a shuddering cry of mortal fear she turned to flee, but at that instant the whole mountain seemed to be shaken with a terrific roar which filled the cavern with its deafening echo.

Ilda recognized it instantly, but the giant's grasp was upon her.

His hand closed over her slender throat, and she felt her senses leaving her.

But help was at hand.

The bearskin curtains were parted violently, and Brutus sprang into the room, crouching there, lashing his sides with fury, and uttering roar after roar as he crept toward the giant, who had turned to face him.

It all happened in an instant, and with the next, Brutus had vaulted through the air, straight at his victim's throat.

It was a sight of horror which Ilda saw as she opened her eyes, for Brutus and the giant were struggling together in a fight which surely meant death to one of them.

CHAPTER IV.

AT BAY IN THE DARK.

When the mountain lion, Brutus, leaped forward upon the giant who had attacked the unprotected Ilda, his aim was straight for the ruffian's throat.

The intruder was unarmed, for his great red knife lay upon the floor, where it had fallen when Ilda had risen from the couch where she had been sleeping.

But even though the man was without weapons of defense, he seemed undaunted by the fury of the savage beast.

His great, muscular arms were outstretched as though to grasp the animal in a tight embrace, and defiance rather than fear shone in his flaming eyes—almost as wild and untamed as those of the lion.

The next instant Brutus was upon him.

His great claws, sharp as needles, were buried in the giant's shoulders, where they tore away the flesh in strips, while his jaws, missing the man's throat by only a little, sank deep into the muscles of the lower part of the neck.

On the other hand, the man, as though gifted with the strength of demons, closed his sinewy arms around the lion's body, and squeezed it with all the strength of which they were capable.

But the power thus brought to bear upon the beast only maddened him the more.

Again and yet again did his savage and merciless jaws open and close with frightful results upon the victim's neck, and it seemed to Ilda as though Brutus' claws would tear the flesh entirely away from the bones of the ruffian's arms.

Suddenly those sinewy arms which had been hugging Brutus so tightly relaxed, and fell harmlessly down, and at the same moment the man sank helplessly to the floor.

With a bound Ilda was upon her feet, and the next instant she had seized Brutus firmly by the nape of his neck.

"Down, Brutus, down!" she ordered. "Down, I say!"

The lion hesitated to obey.

"Down!" cried Ilda again. "Obey me, Brutus!"

But he had got a taste of blood, and he had no wish to desist.

He loosed his hold, and looked up at his mistress, growling savagely, as though to warn her that she must not interfere.

But she was not afraid of her pet even then; even though his eyes were still blazing with all the fury of his untamable nature.

She dropped upon her knees, and threw her arms around the animal's neck, resting her fair, white cheek against his blood-stained muzzle.

"Brutus! Brutus!" she cried. "Will you not mind Ilda?"

She had, perhaps, done the only thing that could have tamed him at that moment.

He forgot his anger, and remembered only his love for his mistress.

Besides, the mentioning of her own name had a wonderful effect upon him, for Silver Sam had taught the lions to recognize it at all times.

"Will you not obey Ilda?" she repeated, rising quickly, and the lion, thoroughly subdued, followed her as she crossed the room, and at her command stretched himself in the corner where he was accustomed to lie.

She petted him for a moment in order to be sure that he would continue to obey her, and then once more drew near to the wounded giant.

The weakest nerves will prove strong in great emergencies, and find themselves suddenly and unexpectedly equal to the occasion.

That the unconscious man was terribly wounded Ilda knew as she bent over him; but he still lived.

Without a second thought she set to work to save him, if possible.

There was a kettle containing water steaming over the fire, and cloths for bandages near at hand.

She was resolved to save the man's life if possible, or, at least to keep him alive until the return of her brother, who, she felt, could not be far away, for he had taken Brutus with him, and Brutus had returned.

But Silver Sam was at that very instant in great peril.

The distance which separated the crevice in the rocks from the cavern was really very short, although he did not realize it, for in going there the darkness had been so intense that he could see nothing, and he had necessarily moved very slowly.

Thus it happened that at the very moment when Brutus sprang roaring into the cavern chamber, Cassius, in obedience to his master's order, had leaped for the top of the rock.

But Cassius, by a process of brute reasoning which the human mind can neither understand nor appreciate, knew that Silver Sam was in danger, and he only half obeyed the directions given him.

True, he leaped to the top of the rocky barrier, but instead of following his companion and returning at once to the cavern and to Ilda, he crouched down just over his master's head and silently waited.

Of this, however, Silver Sam was entirely unconscious, as he braced himself for the ordeal which he felt that he was about to face.

Nor was he mistaken.

The members of that Crimson League, of which our hero reasoned that Captain Flash was undoubtedly the leader, had been, by a very simple device, apprised of his coming.

The narrow fissure through which Silver Sam had entered

was one of their modes of passing to and fro, and, indeed, the only one which nature had provided.

But there was another way which they had, by their own toil, created, and that was a tunnel some sixty yards in length which opened into another narrow canyon, not unlike the one which has already been described, and which ran parallel with it.

Each of these approaches was guarded by nothing more or less than numerous threads of silk, so fine that they would easily snap apart when touched by a man's foot in walking, and that, too, without his being conscious of the fact, but at the same time strong enough, so that when parted they would cause a bell to ring where it would give the men timely warning of danger.

That is precisely what had happened.

The men belonging to the Crimson League had been engaged in card playing and in sleeping when the tinkling of a bell had startled them.

It was all that was necessary, and by the time Silver Sam had entered the little mountain-locked valley, they were ready to receive him.

The shadows, however, had hidden him from view, and his own movements had been so quiet that they were not sure that the enemy had come, after all, and hence the sudden flash which had revealed so much.

During that brief interval Silver Sam had seen them, and they had seen him, but owing to the crouching attitude of the mountain lions, they had escaped notice.

Before the flash was made a huge rock which was worked with weights to bar the fissure when danger threatened, had been lowered.

The weights which worked it were so nicely balanced that had Silver Sam but known it his own strength would have been sufficient to lift it so that he could have passed under it and away.

But who would think of endeavoring to lift a huge rock weighing several tons?

Suddenly, while our hero stood waiting for the moment to come when he must meet death face to face, a sharp report rang out.

The next instant a bullet flattened itself against the rock near him.

He smiled grimly, and threw himself flat upon his face.

The single report was immediately followed by a volley, so that the lead pattered like hailstones above him.

Still he was untouched.

Then, for a few moments, all was silent, but the stillness was at length broken by a voice:

"Look closely, now, and fire when the flash comes!" it said.

On the instant, Silver Sam realized that the flash was to be made again in order to discover if he still lived.

In a second he had rolled over on his back, with his arms outstretched, intent upon causing them to think he was dead.

True, he had to run the risk of being hit by the bullets which would come with the flash, but in a light so uncertain the risk was not great.

The flash came, and with it the bullets, but Silver Sam was not hit.

Then darkness and silence again, and then the noise of approaching feet.

"He's done for," said a voice.

"Must hev a cold dozen o' bullets in his carcass," said another.

The sounds drew nearer, and through his half-closed eyelids Silver Sam could see the glimmering of a torch.

The whole score of men were approaching.

Suddenly there was a frightful roar, and a dark object shot through the air over their heads.

It was the mountain lion, Cassius.

CHAPTER V.

A FOREBODING OF ILL.

The dismay and terror of the members of the Crimson League when the lion sprang upon them from the summit of the rocky barrier was complete.

It seemed to their startled imagination as though the man whom they were hunting had suddenly been metamorphosed into a dragon, which was bent upon devouring them.

With one impulse they turned to fly; and well they might, for who would care to brave the fury of a wild beast in the intense darkness of the canyon, lighted only by the spasmodic flickering of the torches, where they were suddenly thrown down by the terrified men.

In the first assault made by the lion one of the outlaws fell, crushed by the terrific strokes of his huge paw.

Another nearly lost his arm, and a third was almost instantly killed by the frightful pressure of the maddened animal's jaws as they closed upon his throat.

The rout was complete.

In three seconds from the time when Cassius had uttered his first roar of anger, the fissure was deserted of human beings except for Silver Sam and the one victim of the lion's fury.

As for Cassius, he did not attempt to follow them, but stood lashing his sides with his tail, while roar after roar echoed and re-echoed up the mountainsides.

It was enough to appall the stoutest heart.

The flying members of the Crimson League had not thought of returning.

They believed that the man who had so unceremoniously intruded upon them was dead—killed by the discharge of their own weapons when they had fired upon him down the black fissure.

Dead, and, therefore, a prey to the ferocity and hunger of the savage beast that had attacked them in the moment of their success.

They were satisfied, and Silver Sam, smiling grimly, muttered:

"No fear of them returning; Cassius has routed them completely."

He seized the only torch which had not yet become extinct, and by waving it rapidly to and fro several times, once more encouraged it into a blaze.

Cassius was crouching over the body of the man he had killed, growling fiercely, but a word or two of sharp command from Silver Sam sufficed to call him away.

"Now, to take a look at this rock," said our hero, holding the torch so that its light permitted him to see the side of the fissure.

"Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Here are places where the rock is scraped, as though they were in the habit of lowering and raising this barrier at will. It has not been tumbled over here for the first time to-night, for if it had the noise would have reached me."

"It must be worked by weights," he remarked again presently.

Putting the torch in a convenient niche, he stooped, and after crowding his fingers beneath the huge and solid gate of stone, he bent all his energies in the effort, and lifted.

What was his surprise to find that the huge mass slid up-

wards easily—that his strength was more than sufficient to raise it!

Seizing the torch again, and calling to Cassius, he passed rapidly beneath the rock, and paused in safety upon the outer side.

"Whew!" muttered Silver Sam. "Who would expect to find a piece of mechanism like that in this wild region?"

Then he continued musing:

"Well, I am safely out of a very bad fix, thanks to Cassius, who did not obey me when I ordered him to begone.

"Good boy!" he added, patting the lion's huge head. "You knew more than your master, old fellow. You thought that Brutus was enough to guard Ilda, and so you remained with me."

Seizing a firm hold of the rock again, Silver Sam pulled it back into place, for he did not want the outlaws to know that he had discovered the secret by which it was worked.

There was one thing, however, that puzzled him.

How had the Crimson League become apprised of his approach?

By what means had they learned that he was near?

That remained a mystery to him.

"They must have a watch placed somewhere in this fissure," he thought, "and if that is so, the best thing I can do now—is this."

He instantly dropped the torch upon the rocky pathway, and, by stamping upon it, was soon again in total darkness.

Then, exercising great caution, he made his way silently down the fissure toward the canyon.

Little did he think what had happened in his cavern home during his absence, and how opportunely Brutus had arrived upon the scene.

But he was soon to learn that Ilda had met with a very narrow escape, and that she was constantly in danger when there alone, for the advent of the giant plainly demonstrated that others knew of the existence of the cave.

Ilda had nearly completed her task of dressing the red giant's wounds when Silver Sam entered the chamber, and he paused, astounded at the sight which he saw.

In a few words his sister explained all that had occurred, as well as she could.

"He had been here before," she said in conclusion, "for the terrible red knife dropped from my bosom when I arose from the couch, and he was just entering then."

Silver Sam did not know what to say or what to think of the strange circumstance.

He approached the spot where the giant was lying, for Ilda had been unable to move him.

He was still unconscious, and, as Sam thought, likely to remain so for some time to come.

"One thing is certain, Ilda," he said finally, "we have either got to abandon our cavern or move into another part of it entirely, for the presence of this scoundrel proves that you are not safe here for a moment when I am away."

"What! Not with Brutus and Cassius here to warn and defend me?"

"True," replied Sam. "I forgot the faithful beasts."

On the following morning the giant was still unconscious, although he moaned incessantly in a species of wild delirium.

Silver Sam dressed his wounds as best he could, and then, using the chains which had been provided for the two lions, he wound them around the stranger's waist and fastened him securely to the rock.

"There!" he said. "Old Red Beard cannot escape or harm you now, and at the same time he will be perfectly comfortable if he keeps within the limits of his chain. It is locked, and he cannot get away, for I doubt if he is as strong as Brutus. Keep out of his reach, Ilda, and if he recovers con-

sciousness just let one of the beasts growl at him a little. It will serve as a reminder."

"Are you going away?" asked Ilda.

"Yes—to Santa Fe."

"Will you be back to-night?"

"Yes, surely."

"Must you go?"

"I must, Ilda."

It was enough. She did not urge him to remain, but nevertheless there was a strange foreboding of evil in her heart, as she bade him good-by down at the entrance to the grotto, and then turned to make her way back to the chamber, where the unconscious giant was chained to the wall.

Ilda was a brave girl; she had been reared upon the frontier, and was accustomed to the wild life of the border.

She and Silver Sam were twins, and but for the black mustache which shaded her brother's lip, and the difference in costume, it would have been a hard matter to have told one from the other, so perfectly similar were their features and expressions.

"I am foolish," she murmured, as she made her way back to the chamber, "but I cannot help feeling that some ill-fortune is about to happen. But what?"

She pushed aside the bearskin curtain and entered the chamber.

Then she paused, for an instant quite startled.

Red Beard, the giant, had recovered consciousness, and was sitting up on his couch gazing wonderingly around him.

Calling Brutus to her side, Ilda went toward him.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUDDEN INTERRUPTION.

It was the same morning on which Silver Sam left his cavern home for Santa Fe.

Colonel Harrison was sitting in front of the adobe house which he had made his headquarters when a stranger rode up and brought his horse to a standstill just in front of him.

The colonel looked up from the paper he was reading, but he dropped it instantly and leaped quickly to his feet, at the same time drawing his revolver.

The man on horseback before him was the same person who, at the Golden Buck the previous night, had first given him warning and then attempted to shoot him.

"You here!" cried the colonel. "Hands up, quick!"

The stranger put up his hands without an instant's hesitation, smiling a little as he did so.

"Dismount!" ordered the colonel sternly. "I will have your case attended to very shortly."

"Pardon me," replied the stranger coolly, "but as I have come to you voluntarily, it would be but scant courtesy not to allow me the privilege of telling you why I came before placing me under arrest."

"Have you come to give yourself up?" asked the colonel.

"I have come to submit that point to you, sir, to place my life in your hands."

"Bah! You are brave, but you will find me little disposed to mercy for those who attempt my life without reason."

The stranger nodded.

"Will you hear what I have to say?" he asked coolly.

"Yes; speak where you are, but do not attempt to lower your hands or to escape, or I will shoot."

"Wherefore? If I had come here with the intention of shooting you, I could have accomplished it easily before you looked up from your paper."

"True," admitted the colonel.

"My mission is one of peace and one of information. I warned you last night that an enemy was seeking your life."

"Yes, yourself."

"Why should I wish for your death?"

"I do not know, but I do know that a bullet from your revolver nearly killed me."

"That is true, but it was an accident, not design."

The colonel smiled.

"Listen!" continued the stranger, noticing the look of incredulity upon the officer's face. "I knew that Silver Sam was on the warpath for your——"

"Silver Sam!" cried the colonel.

"Yes, Silver Sam."

"Why, you scoundrel, but for him you would have killed me!"

The stranger flushed angrily, but he replied coldly:

"Say, rather, that but for me he would have killed you. I knew he was searching for you, and I went to Golden Buck purposely to give you warning. While I was doing so, he entered and saw us together. Knowing instinctively what I was up to, he thrust himself between us, intending to pick a quarrel with one or both, and that would mean death, for he is quicker than lightning with his weapons, and just as sure."

"I need not say that we are enemies. The feud has been of long standing; and, not expecting to see him there, I was so startled that I pulled and fired before thinking twice."

"Yes, at me."

"No, at Silver Sam."

"But I was the one who was hit, not he."

"True, but you stood in line, and my bullet, missing him, struck you. If I had intended to kill you, would I have given you warning of that fact, as I did, before the shooting took place?"

There was logic in such reasoning, and the colonel was affected by it.

The stranger saw the effect of his words, and continued:

"Silver Sam of Santa Fe is the enemy whom you have to fear. I was just about to mention his name last night, when he interrupted us. You think him a stranger here; then why should he be called Silver Sam of Santa Fe? Ask the landlord of the Golden Buck. He will tell you that he has known this young man off and on for several years. Aye, he will tell you more than that, too, if you ask him."

"What more?"

"Did you ever hear of a band of outlaws known as the Crimson League?"

The colonel started.

"Yes," he replied. "I have heard vague rumors regarding them."

"And of a man called Captain Flash?"

Again the colonel started, and more violently than before.

"What do you know of him?" he exclaimed.

"Do you wish me to tell you?"

"Yes—speak out!"

"Captain Flash, who commands the Crimson League, and Silver Sam of Santa Fe are one and the same, and it is he who seeks your life."

"How do you know this?"

"I can prove it, Colonel," replied the stranger coldly, "if the opportunity occurs. May I take my hands down now?"

"Yes, take them down. Tell me your name, please."

"My name is Albert Belknap, and my home is in San Francisco. I arrived here only yesterday on a prospecting tour, and shall remain in the neighborhood several months, and now, sir, I have a suggestion to make. Silver Sam will doubtless be in Santa Fe to-day. Arrest him and charge him boldly with the attempt upon your life——"

"You forget that he made no such attempt."

"True, none which was apparent. Well, charge him, then, with being the commander of the Crimson League, with the fact that he is Captain Flash in disguise."

"And if he denies it, what proof will I have by which to support these charges?"

"I will furnish the proof."

"You! How? You are a stranger here."

"Not so much so as you think, although I have just arrived."

"Can you furnish witnesses?"

"Yes; three good ones."

"Who are they?"

"The landlord of the Golden Buck is one."

"Well?"

"And the other two are men who have been members of the Crimson League, but who have left it for good. They are now in my employ, but I cannot reveal their names unless you will promise them immunity from the law in return for the evidence which they will give."

The colonel hesitated a moment, and then he said:

"If your employees will deliver into my hands the person of Captain Flash, the outlaw, I will make the promise which you require. But the proof must be convincing, and the identification complete."

"Agreed."

Belknap was about to turn away when the colonel spoke again.

"Wait," he said. "The arrest and trial of Captain Flash is within my jurisdiction, for I have received orders concerning him. I will issue the necessary warrant, and you may take it to the marshal, if you will."

"Certainly," replied Belknap.

The colonel retired to his house for a few moments, and presently returned, handing a sealed paper to his caller, who at once took his departure.

"I doubt that man, in spite of his fair words," muttered Colonel Harrison, when he was alone; "nor can I help feeling confidence in Silver Sam. There is some deviltry at work here, and I will find it."

So saying, he again entered his house, from which he presently emerged and took his way toward the Golden Buck.

There were, as usual, a good many idlers scattered about the saloon, and some were already engaged in games of chance.

Colonel Harrison entered, walked straight to the bar, and after taking a glass of wine sought the isolated table in the corner where Belknap had been seated on the previous night.

Thirty minutes passed, and then the marshal, followed by a party of five desperate looking men, entered.

They immediately repaired to a table, and to all appearances were soon absorbed in a game of poker.

But the watchful colonel saw plainly that it was a "fake" game, upon which no money was staked, and that they were only playing to escape notice.

Several minutes passed, and then the door again opened.

This time it admitted the person of Albert Belknap.

He glanced around the room leisurely, and then strolled aimlessly to the table, where the marshal and his men were engaged.

"Take a chance in, pard?" asked one of them, as he drew near.

"Yes, if there is no objection," replied Belknap, and in another moment he was apparently as absorbed as they over the "fake" game.

Several stragglers dropped in, and finally the door was thrown wide open, and Silver Sam entered.

Glancing eagerly around the room, his piercing eyes almost instantly lighted upon the face of Belknap, and a heavy frown swept over his features.

For an instant he hesitated, as if he intended to leave the place, but a second thought came, and he strode boldly forward.

Belknap's back was toward the entrance, while the others, although they had noticed every new arrival since they came in, had somehow failed to see the person of Silver Sam.

Thus it was not one of them knew that he was there until the informer felt a heavy hand upon his shoulder and heard a stern voice say:

"A word with you, please!"

Belknap leaped to his feet as though suddenly brought into contact with an electric battery, and his hand flew instantly to his bootleg.

But Silver Sam was prepared for him.

He stepped back quickly, and extended both arms, and in each hand he held a never-failing six-shooter.

"Hands up!" he said sternly, "or you're a dead man!"

One or two of the players made a motion as if to draw, but the quick eye of Silver Sam saw and understood it.

"No interference," he said coldly. "I have got you all covered, and the very first man who attempts to draw, I'll kill! This is our little picnic, and you, gentlemen, have nothing to do with it."

The marshal bit his lip with vexation, for Silver Sam plainly had the best of the game thus far.

The colonel, over in his corner, smiled and wondered, and waited.

"Stand up!" ordered Silver Sam, addressing Belknap. "Face the door! Now march!"

"Where?" sulkily.

"Through the door."

"And suppose I refuse?"

"I'll kill you!"

The informer laughed aloud.

"Oh, no, you won't, Sammy!" he said. "You won't kill me unless you have to."

"I will wait just one minute," said Silver Sam sternly, "and if you do not obey me, I will shoot you! If you don't believe me, try it."

The marshal, during the short conversation, had had time to think, and he had cautiously worked his hand around until it grasped the butt of his revolver.

When our hero ceased speaking, he suddenly raised the weapon, and pointed it directly at Silver Sam's heart.

"Drop it!" he said.

Sam's eyes flashed fire.

With scarcely a perceptible movement of the wrist he discharged one of his revolvers.

It was done so quickly that even though the marshal was prepared, he could do nothing to prevent it.

He leaped to his feet with a cry of pain.

The ball from Silver Sam's weapon had shot away one of his fingers and knocked the revolver from his hand.

He was wild with rage.

In the fury of the instant he forgot his own peril, and leaped straight over the card table toward the bold stranger.

But Silver Sam did not move from his position.

His weapon spoke again, however, and while the marshal was in mid-air.

The ball struck him, and he fell to the floor with a crash.

Consternation was written upon every face.

"March!" ordered Silver Sam sternly to Belknap. "The marshal is not hurt much; he will recover in a moment or two; my ball only grazed him."

Belknap saw that there was no help for it.

He was about to obey, when an interruption came from a most unexpected quarter.

Even Silver Sam was astounded, and for an instant thrown off his guard.

The huge pane of glass, which comprised the entire upper half of the front door, fell crashing inwards, while through the aperture swept the lithe but powerful and ferocious figure of Cassius, the mountain lion.

CHAPTER VII.

AT BAY.

A cry of wonder and alarm went up from every person in the saloon when Cassius so suddenly sprang into their midst.

A dozen hands flew instantly toward the butts of a dozen different revolvers, but the stern and unrelenting voice of Silver Sam warned them all that it would be extremely dangerous to draw.

"Ware!" he cried, and the dozen hands stopped abruptly upon their way toward the weapons.

"Down, Cassius!" again rang out the voice of Silver Sam, as soon as he saw that his previous order had been obeyed, and the lion, instantly obeying his master's order, crouched upon the floor at his feet, beginning at once to purr contentedly.

The men assembled there looked on in wonder. They had never seen a beast of that kind under the passive subjection of man before, and they could not understand it.

Belknap was, perhaps, the only one except Silver Sam himself in all that room who did not appear disconcerted by the beast's advent upon the scene.

There was a sarcastic, devil-may-care smile upon his face which Sam did not fail to notice.

But he paid no heed to it.

"Gentlemen," he said, still keeping everything in the room well in hand—or, rather, well within the range of his eyes and weapons—"I owe you an apology. This panther is a pet of mine, and I had no idea he had followed me here. I did not mean to frighten you."

"Frighten us!" blustered one of the marshal's men. "I guess we ain't afraid o' no onery beast like that."

"Oh," said Silver Sam, "you're one of those bravos, I take it, who are afraid of nothing. Am I right?"

"Thet's about the size of it, Pard Stranger."

"Indeed!"

"You kin bet yer quilts on thet!"

"One would scarcely believe it to look at you," said Sam, smiling ironically.

"What d'yer mean by that?" blustered the man.

"Nothing," retorted Silver Sam, "except that you look like a coward. I may be mistaken, though—you may be a very brave man, but I don't believe it."

"Yer don't, eh? Say, be you a-lookin' fer gore?"

For answer Silver Sam turned one of his weapons upon the speaker, and instantly his hands went up at least six inches higher than they were before, while his face turned to the color of ashes.

Everybody laughed, even Belknap.

"Enough!" said Silver Sam sharply. "It is time for us to go."

"Where to?" asked Belknap coolly.

"You'll find out when you get there," replied Silver Sam. "March!"

"Watch him, Cassius!" ordered Silver Sam, of the lion, and the huge beast instantly took his place by the prisoner's side, and walked with them towards the door.

"Don't attempt to turn around or to draw a weapon," said Silver Sam warningly to Belknap; "that is, if you place any

value on your life. If you do either, Cassius will make mince-meat of you in no time."

For the first time Belknap shuddered.

The strange trio strode onward towards the door, but they had not quite reached it when a loud voice full of command rang through the room.

"Halt!" it said.

All three paused instantly.

Even the lion seemed to recognize the element of command in that powerful voice.

It was Colonel Harrison who had spoken, and he strode forward ere the sound of his voice had ceased to ring through the room.

Silver Sam, quickly speaking a sharp word or two to the faithful animal, in which he told him to watch the prisoner, turned and faced the approaching officer.

"What do you mean by this high-handed proceeding?" demanded the colonel sternly.

"That can be seen better than explained," replied Silver Sam coolly.

"Release that man," demanded the officer, pointing toward Belknap; but Sam only smiled.

"I guess not, Colonel."

"I insist upon it!"

"And I refuse. He is my prisoner, and I am going to take him away. I would do anything to please you, but now you ask too much."

"I command here—not you!" cried the colonel.

"You do not command me, quite," retorted Sam.

"Release him, I say!"

"Not much!"

The colonel's hand fell to the butt of his revolver, but Silver Sam saw it, and raised his own quickly.

"Don't draw, Colonel," he said coldly. "I am your friend—not your enemy. I would not quarrel with you for the world, but if you attempt to draw that weapon, I will protect myself."

There was a blaze of light in Silver Sam's eyes, and a determined sound in his voice which convinced the colonel that he was in no trifling mood.

"Do you know who this man is?" asked Sam, indicating Belknap.

"I do; he has told me."

"His name, perhaps; but do you know that he is the man who tried to shoot you?"

"No, I do not. He denies it."

"Oh, does he? How does he prove his denial?"

"He was warning me at the moment when you entered the other night."

"Warning you of what?"

"That you were seeking my life."

"I?"

"Yes, if you are Silver Sam of Santa Fe."

"And he said that I sought your life?"

"Yes; he was telling me when you came in."

"Well?"

"The ball that struck me came from his weapon, but it was meant for you."

"I guess that's so," assented Silver Sam.

"Sir!" said the colonel, after a short pause, "I feel that it is my duty to say a word to you."

"Say on," said Sam. "I'm listening."

"You have got the advantage, and can take your prisoner from this room despite my orders."

"Well, rather."

"But you cannot take him far."

"Why not?"

"Because I will send a troop after you instantly, and they will bring you back."

"They will have to fight to do it," replied Silver Sam coldly. "And I can promise you that they won't all return."

"Would you fight against my troops?" asked the colonel in astonishment.

"I will fight anybody who opposes me, sir."

"But they will bring you back, nevertheless."

"I doubt it."

"You will be a prisoner."

"Perhaps."

"Do you know that there is a grave charge against you?"

"Against me?"

"Yes, you are said to be Captain Flash, chief of the Crimson League."

Silver Sam laughed heartily.

"Do you believe it?"

"Your prisoner so charges you, and says that he can prove it," said the colonel coldly.

Silver Sam started.

"Oho!" he cried. "I think I see through that little game of yours, friend—what do you call yourself now?—Belknap! It is very strange, Colonel, and rather amusing, also, but I make the same charge against him. He is Captain Flash, not I."

The colonel looked disgusted; indeed, he felt so. It was very aggravating to have these two men before him, each charging the other with the same offenses, and it was rendered more so from the fact that Silver Sam had him defenseless.

But he did not think to be so for long. He was a good officer, a good man, and a very shrewd one, and his talk with the utterly fearless fellow who defied him was only to gain time.

"I begin to think that you are both of questionable character," he muttered.

"Thanks!" replied Silver Sam. "If you have finished, I will go."

"You are determined to defy me?" asked the colonel.

"In this, yes."

"Very well. Go, then. You won't go far."

"Why not?"

"Because, sir, you are now my prisoner."

Silver Sam laughed loudly.

"You may laugh," said the colonel haughtily, "but a company of soldiers have just drawn up in line in front of the saloon. You know what that means. Oblige me by handing me your weapons."

Sam saw in an instant that he had been trapped, but he had no idea of submitting. He was playing a desperate game, and he knew that he must either win or lose it all.

His revolver still covered the heart of Colonel Harrison, who, never dreaming that Silver Sam would be foolhardy enough to resist arrest in the face of such overwhelming odds, took one step forward to relieve him of it.

"Halt!" ordered Silver Sam. His eyes sparkled with anger. His lips were set firmly together; his face was cold and relentless; it was evident that he would never swerve from the resolution which he had formed at that moment.

"Colonel Harrison," he said coldly, "if you take one more step; if you so much as move—aye, if any one of your men raises a hand against me, with that instant you die. Do you understand me?"

The colonel was pale, but undaunted.

"I do," he calmly replied.

"I will give you," continued Silver Sam, in the same cold, relentless tone, "just sixty seconds in which to send an order to your men."

"And that order?" asked the colonel.

"Is for them to allow me to pass with my prisoner unmolested."

"I will not send it," said the colonel.

"If," continued Sam, "at the end of sixty seconds you have not sent them the order, I will shoot you without mercy."

Colonel Harrison turned paler still, but he was a brave man, and in carrying out that which he believed to be his duty he had no fear.

"You need not wait sixty seconds," he replied, calmly. "You may shoot now, for I will not send the order. Shoot if you will!"

"No," replied Silver Sam. "I will wait the sixty seconds."

CHAPTER VIII.

SIX HOURS' REPRIEVE.

Slowly the seconds ticked themselves away, and the silence of death reigned in the room.

It was, indeed, a strange circumstance to witness, where one gallant, fearless man defied a roomful of desperate characters, aye, and a company of U. S. soldiers, who were waiting outside to arrest him.

But if Silver Sam was brave, so, also, was Colonel Harrison.

He knew no fear when duty called, and in the present instance he felt that his duty was imperative.

"Colonel," said Silver Sam, "but a few seconds remain in which you may save your own life by granting me the permission to depart. For you I feel infinite respect and esteem. Will you not grant me this privilege I ask if I promise faithfully to return and submit myself to your orders?"

"No," replied the colonel shortly.

"Is there no way of compromising this circumstance? I assure you, sir, that I will keep my word."

The colonel hesitated.

"Yes," he said at last; "there is one way."

"What is that?"

"Leave your prisoner here."

"Do you demand it?"

"I do."

"And if I consent?"

"You will be permitted to depart unmolested. You will be given an immunity of six hours, after which I will pursue you relentlessly, and if caught you will be shot."

"Ah!"

"You see that it will be best for you to leave the neighborhood of Santa Fe."

"Exactly."

"Leave your prisoner and depart. In six hours there will be a reward for you, dead or alive."

"I accept your compromise," said Silver Sam shortly. "Col. Harrison, the prisoner is yours."

The colonel bowed coldly, and calmly drew his watch from his pocket.

"Gentlemen," he said, turning to the others in the room, "you have heard the agreement between Silver Sam of Santa Fe and myself. It is now eleven o'clock A. M. I will pay one thousand dollars in gold to any person who will bring him to me dead or alive at any time after five o'clock this afternoon."

"And I will make it two!" cried Belknap. "Two thousand dollars in gold for Silver Sam, dead or alive."

Our hero smiled.

"Proceed, gentlemen," he said genially, but with cutting irony. "Will not some one raise the bid? What! Only two thousand dollars for my life? Why, I have more than that in my pockets now."

The colonel glanced coldly at Belknap.

"You all understand," he continued icily. "Until five o'clock he must remain absolutely unmolested. Whoever interferes with him in any way prior to that hour shall answer with his life. Do you all hear me? Answer."

"We do!" came in a chorus from the crowd.

"And will you obey? Will he remain free to go and come; to do as he pleases, until that hour?" continued the colonel.

"He will," spoke the chorus.

"Thanks, gentlemen, awfully," said Silver Sam, with a light laugh, at the same instant returning the weapon, which until that moment he had held in readiness, to his pocket. "As you will one and all be on the warpath for my scalp in a few hours, I will give you a send-off, anyway. Waltz right up to the captain's office and whisper the title of your poison. I'll settle. This is with me."

The crowd was by no means slow to accept the invitation, and in less than a moment afterwards every one there, except the colonel, Belknap and the marshal, were proposing the health, long life and prosperity of Silver Sam.

A strange irony of fate, and yet there was nothing unusual about it for that region and during the time of which this story is told.

The colonel, followed by Belknap, left the saloon immediately after the agreement was thoroughly understood.

The marshal was just returning to consciousness.

The ball from the revolver of Silver Sam had grazed his temple, but had only stunned him.

When he opened his eyes to a full realization of his surroundings, the first object of which they became cognizant was the form of Silver Sam standing in front of him, glass in hand.

"Have a drink, Marshal?" he said. "It will brace you up, you know."

The marshal endeavored to leap to his feet, and his hands flew toward his weapons.

But a dozen of his companions instantly seized him.

In a few words they related all that had taken place, and the officer was satisfied.

"Here's my hand, pard," he said, rising to his feet. "I sorter owe my life to you, 'cos ef you'd been in my place an' me in yourn I'd ha' killed you—see?"

Silver Sam nodded.

"But you didn't kill me, pard."

"No, not quite."

"That's it—not quite. Well, you're under my protection till five o'clock—see? An' arter that you're my meat. Air thet square?"

"Perfectly."

"You accept the prop?"

"I do."

"That's square. Now, boyees, I'll treat."

There was once more a round of drinks for the crowd, during which Silver Sam noticed that the marshal was slowly passing from one to another of the men he knew best in the crowd.

Our hero scented mischief, and resolved to watch closely everything which transpired.

He kept his eyes upon the marshal, and noticed particularly to whom he addressed himself in that sly manner while they were standing at the bar.

"If those fellows slide out on the quiet before long," thought Silver Sam, "I'll know what's up."

"Hello!" he continued a moment later. "Sooner than I thought. One of them is going now."

The big fellow who had proclaimed himself the possessor of so much sand, and so visibly paled before the muzzle of Silver Sam's revolver, was the one referred to.

"Well, pards," he said, after tossing down a glassful of vile

liquor which had been set before him, "I'm sorry to shake ye jest es ther fun is commencin', but it's got ter be did."

"Say, pard," he continued, going up to our hero, "I forgive you fur the insult to my honor."

"To your what?" asked Sam.

"My honor."

"Oh, all right! I did not know you had any, I'm sure. Thanks, all the same."

"What do you mean?" cried Black Mike, for that was his name.

"Haven't you got any understanding, either?" asked Silver Sam, smiling sarcastically.

"I'll show you whether I have or not, when five o'clock comes!" cried the fellow, enraged by our hero's cool contempt.

"Bah! Do you think you've got me coppered to lose?"

"I does. I know it. Ye're bound to lose," returned the ruffian, for he was nothing else, and was known as such by everybody.

"Black Mike," said Silver Sam coolly, "you're a liar!"

"What!" cried the man, attempting to draw; but his friends at once seized him.

"I will tell you something," said our hero, smiling coldly. "You are going out now to post yourself where you have reason to think that I will pass, and as I do so, you intend to shoot me from behind a bush or rock, and then at five o'clock bring me into camp. Isn't that your little game, Mikey?"

The cheeks of the ruffian paled perceptibly.

It was the very scheme which he intended to work, and he marveled how Silver Sam could have found it out.

"I'll tell you more," continued Sam. "There are five others here, who have agreed to do the same thing. You intend to make sure game of me, don't you? Don't bluster, gentlemen. I know you all, and you are going to get left."

Turning quickly, our hero strode toward the door.

At his heels was Cassius.

When at the entrance to the saloon he paused, and spoke a few words to the panther in a low tone, which none of the men could hear.

"Gentlemen," he said then, returning to the group, "for the present I am general of the forces, and there, at the door, is my sentinel. I am going to remain right here until four o'clock, and whosoever tries to leave this room before that time, without my consent, will make a meal for the mountain lion. You see, Marshal, I have blocked your little game."

The marshal scowled.

"There's another that we can play," he said; "when four o'clock comes, we kin keep ye in sight till five, an' then——"

Silver Sam laughed, but he did not know that the entire force of the Crimson League were on their way to capture him.

CHAPTER IX.

*BEAUTIFUL INEZ.

When the man whom we know as Belknap, but who was in reality no other than Captain Flash of the Crimson League, left the saloon in company with Colonel Harrison, a plan was already revolving in his brain by which Silver Sam could be captured without danger.

"Colonel," he said, as soon as they were outside, "the time of Silver Sam's immunity from harm expires at five. At six he shall be a prisoner in your hands."

The colonel started.

"You seem confident," he said.

"I am," replied Flash, as we will hereafter call him. "I will deliver him to you by six or very soon after."

"But how?"

"I know the direction he will take when he quits Santa Fe."

"And you purpose intercepting him?"

"Yes."

"But suppose he should leave now? He would have time to avoid you before five."

"True; but he will not do so."

"Why?"

"I know the man's character thoroughly. He is daring to foolhardiness. It would not surprise me if he remained in that saloon until a few minutes before five, just to prove that he does not fear you. I would be willing to wager that he will not take more than an hour's start, and if he remains in camp till four o'clock I will have him here at six, or my name is not——"

"What?"

"Albert Belknap, Colonel."

"Very well," said the colonel. "We will part here. You may do as you please, but remember there must be no foul play. Not a hair of his head shall be touched before five o'clock. I have given my word, and that is sacred. After that do as you please."

Colonel Harrison turned and strode hurriedly away towards his quarters, while Belknap stood watching him with an evil smile upon his dark face.

"Curse you for your honesty," he muttered at the retreating figure of the brave officer. "There is a long reckoning between us, Colonel Harrison, and some day we will foot it up to the last bit. But I can wait yet a while. I can wait!"

He turned on his heel and hurried in the opposite direction, thinking half aloud as he walked.

"Yes, I can wait," he muttered. "I hold the winning hand in this game, and if I play my cards right I am sure to succeed. But first of all, Silver Sam, curse him! must be disposed of. With him out of the way I know that I can win, and you, Colonel Harrison, must be my cat's-paw."

He hurried down a side street until at last he paused before a roughly but solidly built adobe house.

He struck the panel of the door sharply with the butt of his revolver, and then inserting a key in the lock entered.

There were two rough-looking men seated at a table playing cards when he entered, and they looked up quickly, but did not discontinue their occupation.

"Work—quick work—sharp work for both of you!" said Flash shortly.

Instantly they dashed their cards aside and leaped to their feet.

"You, Barney, must start at once for the land-locked valley," continued the chief. "Get all the boys out, well armed; conduct them to the mouth of the little canyon, and put them in ambush. Silver Sam will pass there before midnight. Let every man draw a careful bead upon him and shoot to kill. Do you understand?"

"Yes, chief."

"Go! Do not fail! If you do your life shall pay for it. Go!"

Without a word, the man called Barney arose and departed, and five minutes later he was dashing through the outskirts of Santa Fe, urging his horse to its greatest speed. He knew that the menace of their chief was no idle one.

As soon as he had left the room, the chief turned to the other, a Mexican half-breed, with an evil face, who was noted among his fellows for his cunning and ferocity.

"Pete," said Flash, "go to the Golden Buck. You will find Silver Sam of Santa Fe there. Watch him. Don't lose sight of him at your peril. Here is money; spend it. Treat the boys. Tell them any story you like. They don't know you, and they'll swallow your yarns. Make friends with Sam if you can. Find out which way he rides to-night. Follow

him to the corral when he leaves. See which way he goes. Then return here and we will take the trail together. He must not escape me this time. Go!"

"Si, senor!" replied Pete, and in another moment he, too, had left the adobe building.

For several moments Captain Flash remained silent and thoughtful.

Then, taking a key from his pocket, he opened a door which communicated with a room at the back of the one where he found the men.

It was luxuriously furnished for that region.

A soft carpet covered the floor; easy chairs and sofas were tastefully arranged about the room; pictures and engravings hung upon the walls; several shelves were loaded with books.

But there was something even more startling than the appointments there.

It was the presence of a young and beautiful girl seated in a chair near one of the iron-barred windows.

She was rapturously beautiful, with great, glorious eyes and a dark, Spanish face, the personification of an exquisite dream.

As Flash entered, there was a look of cold scorn and contempt upon her face.

He could not know that she had been listening at the door, and that she had heard all that had passed between him and his two men, for when he entered, she was leaning back in her chair with an open book upon her lap, as though she had been in that attitude for an hour or more.

Had Captain Flash looked closely he would have seen that the book was upside down, but he did not think of that, and therefore did not notice.

"Inez," he said, not unkindly, "is there any thing that you require—anything which I can do to make you comfortable?"

She smiled scornfully but did not answer.

"You wrong me," he continued. "True, I keep you a prisoner here against your will, but you are treated with all respect, and your wants are filled so far as it is in my power to please you."

Still she did not speak.

"You persist in this unnatural silence still, I see. It only lengthens your captivity, Inez. When you reveal that which I wish to know, you shall be set at liberty, but not before. Come, will you not speak?"

Inez sighed and picked up her book, and one would have thought from the way she resumed her reading that she had forgotten the presence of her jailor.

As for him, he scowled fiercely.

"Have a care, Inez!" he said menacingly. "I shall not always be as forbearing as now. You are completely in my power, and when I get tired of waiting to hear your voice you shall be made to feel your helplessness."

Inez shrugged her shoulders disdainfully, but did not look up from her book.

"There are others whom you know who will soon be in my power also," continued Flash. "Perhaps if you have no fear for yourself you can be made to fear for them."

She looked up, started, but again resumed her reading.

"Aha! That touches you, does it not?" exclaimed the outlaw chief.

He took two or three hasty steps toward her.

"Come, Inez, be reasonable——" he began, but then he paused, dismayed.

She had leaped to her feet, like a lioness at bay. Her eyes flashed fitful gleams of fire; her beautiful face was dark with passionate hate.

In her right hand gleamed the blade of a poniard, and her whole attitude told him that she would use it, should he approach too near.

Raising her left hand, she pointed toward the door.

She did not speak, but the outlaw knew that it was danger-

ous for him to remain; he knew that she could throw that delicate weapon with as much accuracy as he could shoot bullets from his revolver.

With a low laugh, to conceal the fear he felt, he passed through the door and closed and locked it behind him.

No sooner had he gone than Inez returned the poniard to her bosom.

Then she sprang to the door and fastened it upon the inside.

"Now," she said softly, "I must work. The time has come. It must be now or never."

From beneath a couch she drew forth a complete suit of masculine garments of Mexican pattern.

They belonged to Captain Flash, and she had found them in the room she occupied, which had been formerly his own.

Weeks had been consumed in altering them to fit her, but she had accomplished it.

"Aye, and more. She had also found a means of exit from that room other than the door by which Flash had entered.

"I heard their dark plot," she murmured, as she disrobed, preparatory to donning the disguise, "and I will save this Silver Sam. Perhaps then he will help me! Yes, I will save him."

Would she? Could she?

Silver Sam was at that very instant in greater peril than ever, for Mexican Pete, wily and cunning, had just reached the Golden Buck.

CHAPTER X.

"YOU HUNT ME—I HUNT YOU!"

The mountain lion, Cassius, remained crouched at the door of the saloon known as the Golden Buck, and none others had the temerity to make the attempt to pass him.

The marshal and his men bit their lips in vexation.

They realized that in some way unknown to them Silver Sam had tumbled to their racket, and that they were checkmated.

Moreover, there was no help for it—no way out of the predicament.

The person of Silver Sam was as safe from their molestation up to the hour of five as though he had been a hundred leagues distant, for one and all knew the character of Colonel Harrison, and knew consequently that their lives would not be worth a moment's purchase should his orders be disobeyed.

It therefore followed that they no more dared to injure the crouching lion at the door than they did his master.

Why?

Because he would be sure to promptly resent it, and a general fight would follow, the consequences of which would be exactly the same as it would be if one of them should deliberately have sent a ball into the brain of our hero.

No, they were trapped, and they knew it.

There was no way out of the dilemma, and there remained nothing for them to do but to wait patiently until Silver Sam chose to raise the siege.

That he had no intention of doing until the last moment, as the reader knows.

An hour went by, and the men began to grow uneasy under the restraint.

There were two or three in the saloon who secretly sympathized with our hero, but they dared not manifest it openly. The sentiment of the majority was too strong for that.

But the quick eye of Silver Sam saw the difference, and he was correspondingly pleased.

"Marshal," he said suddenly, "I think it would be well if we understood each other."

"Right ye are, Silver. Fire away!" retorted the officer.

"At five o'clock you're going on the warpath," continued Sam.

"Bet yer dust on thet!"

"And I am the one you will be after."

"Waal, it air a galoot about yer size an' shape, an' with your cheek."

"Exactly. In other words, Silver Sam of Santa Fe."

"Thet's 'bout ther size of it."

"Any personal grudge, Marshal?"

"Jest a leetle, but not wuth mentioning," replied the officer, pointing to the wound on his temple. "I could forgive thet, 'cos 'twar a good snap shot."

"I see. You don't mind the scratch. It's ducats you are after."

"Betcher boots!"

"Two thousand, eh?"

The marshal nodded emphatically.

"Well," Silver Sam continued, "I'm naturally curious to know how you are going to collar the shiners?"

"Ye air, eh?"

"Yes; are you going to take me dead—or alive? Which?"

"Waal," said the man coolly, "I hev an idea, that you'd be easier to handle if you war dead—see?"

"Yes, I see. Then you are going to shoot me on sight?"

"Thet's about it."

"Without giving me a show?"

"It's gotter be did, Silver. Yer too quick with yer gun. 'Tain't quite square, I know, but, then, ye're warned, an' thet's suthin'."

"Yes, that's fair enough. I'm not kicking."

"Bully fer you, Silver! I hate ter lay yer out, but I've gotter do it."

"Yes, unless you get laid out first."

"Waal, I ain't cryin' 'bout thet."

"Of course not. We both begin the hunt at the same time—that's fair."

"Yes; I'm goin' ter hunt you, an' you're goin' ter hunt cover."

"Not much."

"Waal, wot are ye goin' ter hunt, then?"

"I'm going to hunt you."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"What fur?"

"For instance. See?" and Silver Sam laughed heartily. "You are going to drop me on sight, and it's my intention to return the compliment."

The marshal visibly weakened.

"That ain't square," he said.

"Why not?"

"'Cos you don't give me no show."

"Well, you don't grant me any, either."

"But I've got ther law on my side."

"Bah!" said Silver Sam contemptuously. "The situation is this: At five o'clock we begin to hunt. You hunt me, and I hunt you; the one who gets the first sight of the other wins. That is fair, isn't it?"

The marshal did not reply.

"Gentlemen," said Sam, turning to the others, "I appeal to you all. Isn't my proposition fair?"

"Square as a brick!" came the answer, but from three voices only.

The rest of the crowd scowled fiercely at them, but Sam bowed and smiled, and said: "Thank you."

"Now, Marshal," continued our hero, "I want to know who I have got to plug in this little game. Those who are going to join the marshal please step up to the bar and drink

at my expense. There is no feeling between us until five o'clock."

All but the three above referred to immediately approached the bar.

They stood back, but at the same time cast longing glances at the others.

Sam remained in the center of the room.

The marshal noticed it, and turned just as he and his crowd were raising their glasses to their lips.

"Ain't ye goin' ter drink with us?" he asked.

"No," replied Sam coolly.

"Why not?"

"I never drink with scoundrels and cutthroats when I know it. After you are through, and the glasses have been washed, these three gentlemen and I will take our refreshments."

A dozen weapons were drawn instantly, but Silver Sam was prepared.

"Wait!" he said sternly. "Remember your orders. No guns, please."

"But them galoots ain't with you in this 'ere deal," said the marshal, pointing to the three.

"Yes, they are," replied Sam coolly. "If you molest them, you hurt me. They are gentlemen and you are a pack of blow-hards and cowards."

Again there was a movement to draw, but the men desisted.

Silver Sam smiled.

"I see you drink at my expense, all the same," he said. "Are you through? Really! Won't you have another? No? Well, gentlemen"—turning to the three—"we will imbibe something now. That is, you may, and I'll take lemonade with you. I never take anything stronger."

Many were the dark and scowling glances that were cast at our hero and his three friends as they approached the bar.

Nor did the three men seem to like it over much, but they had been forced into the position and could not very well withdraw.

"I'm sorry, boys," said Sam, as they drew up before the bar.

"Our lives ain't worth an ounce of silver," said one of them, "after five o'clock comes—that is, if we stay here."

"Go with me, then," retorted Sam.

"Whar to?" asked another, "to jine the Crimson League?"

"No; to down the whole gang of them."

"Do you mean it, pard?"

"I do."

"Square and honest? No crooked work? 'Cos I ain't built that way, and no more is my pards here."

Silver Sam was pleased.

"Gentlemen," he said in a low tone, so that the others could not hear, "if you choose to cast your fortunes with mine, I will show you where these came from," and he took several small chunks of virgin silver from his pocket, one of which he tossed to the bartender to weigh out and give him the change. "It is because I always pay with those that I am called Silver Sam. Are you with me?"

"We are," they answered as one.

"We came here together," continued the older one of the three, "and we'll stick together. We've gone broke, and you're the fellow we'll tie to."

"Good! What are your names?"

"Tom, Dick and Harry!"

Silver Sam was about to speak again when the lion growled fiercely.

He turned quickly to see the door open and a stranger enter.

"Let him pass," he said to Cassius, and the stranger strode into the room.

As the reader suspects, it was Mexican Pete.

The marshal at once stepped forward.

"Stranger," he said, "afore ye go any further ye're called upon to decide which crowd ye herds with."

Pete looked astonished, and then the marshal proceeded to explain. He told the whole story from beginning to end, and Pete heard him through.

"Now," said the marshal, "which is your crowd?"

"The other," answered Pete shortly, who saw an excellent opportunity of working in as a friend of Silver Sam's. "The whole gang is against four, an' I'll raise the ante to five."

Sam was pleased.

It did not occur to him to suspect treachery, for he knew that the newcomer was a stranger.

"Pards, I'm wid yer," said Pete, going toward the bar.

It is needless to say that Silver Sam accepted the proffered help without question, but the marshal was furious.

"Silver Sam," he said, "ye're a smart cus, but you've made a bloomin' error. This 'ere galoot's a stranger hyar, an' as an officer of this city I feel it my duty to warn ye. I believe he's a spy, an'——"

In an instant Pete's hand shot out. It contained a six-shooter, and the marshal would have been shot dead in his tracks had not Silver Sam knocked the weapon aside, thus saving his life, and causing the ball to go through the ceiling.

"None of that," said Sam sternly. "I'm boss here."

CHAPTER XI.

THE LION LEAPS.

Mexican Pete scowled darkly, and for a moment his temper almost got the better of him. As for the marshal, he scarcely knew what to do or say.

"Silver," he exclaimed, "you saved my life. 'Shake!'"

Our hero looked at him in astonishment.

"No, thank you!" he replied. "You owe me nothing. 'I don't shake hands with scoundrels.'"

The marshal retired in disgust. He was helpless to resent Silver Sam's words then, but he resolved to remember them all.

The two parties divided.

Sam and his four friends were at the front of the saloon near the door.

The marshal and his men were at the rear.

Suddenly the lion growled again, but not so fiercely as before.

Sam spoke to him, and he quieted down.

In another moment the door was thrown quickly open, and a youth, in the full costume of a Mexican, appeared in the opening.

That he was both young and handsome our hero saw at a glance. His dress was as rich and gaudy as gold and silver could make it, while the broad sombrero which he wore sparkled with jewels.

At the instant that he appeared he called out in clear, ringing tones:

"Silver Sam of Santa Fe!"

"Here!" cried our hero, stepping forward quickly.

The youth, who did not seem to be over eighteen years of age, stepped within the saloon and closed the door behind him.

"May I have a word with you in private?" asked the youth.

"You may," replied Silver Sam, and he led the unknown youth toward a distant corner.

"My name is Marco," he said, as soon as they were where they could not be heard. "Never mind the other. I have been a captive of Captain Flash, and have just escaped, but I heard a plot to assassinate you."

"When and where?" asked our hero, looking at the youth in surprise.

"At a place called the little canyon, to-night," returned Marco, who the reader knows was Inez in disguise.

Silver Sam started.

"They know, then, where I live?" he muttered, but the youth overheard the words.

"I do not think so," he said, "but they know that you pass through the canyon."

"Who are you?" asked Sam abruptly.

"Marco. I can tell you no more of myself, except that I want your protection."

Silver Sam smiled.

"A poor protection," he said, "since I am outlawed, and with a price on my head, dead or alive."

"Then why are you here?"

Our hero explained.

"You need men?" said Marco, when he had finished.

"Yes—badly."

"If I had a horse I could get some for you."

"But you just now asked for my protection," exclaimed Sam suspiciously. "That was strange, when you could go to Col. Harrison instead, and now you say that you have men at your command."

Marco looked up quickly.

"Silver Sam," he said, "I am your friend. There are reasons why I cannot go to the colonel. My conduct may seem strange, but you can trust me. To go for the men is dangerous, but with a good horse I can do it. With a good animal I need no protection—just now."

There was something in the eyes of the youth—something in the tone of his voice, which sent all of Silver Sam's doubts to the four winds.

"Can you trust me?" asked Marco. "Believe me, I know more of your affairs than you think I do. I can and will be of assistance to you."

"Yes, I will trust you," replied Sam.

"Can you get me a horse?"

"Yes—take mine."

"But what will you do?"

"I? Well, I will take the first one I lay my hands on—the marshal's, I think. If I am an outlaw, I will have a part of the game as well as the name."

Marco's eyes sparkled.

"Describe your horse," he said, "and tell me where to find him."

Silver Sam did so, and the youth without delay turned to depart.

As he did so, Mexican Pete made some remark in a loud tone, and Marco paused suddenly.

He recognized the voice instantly, although he had never seen his face.

He turned quickly to Silver Sam.

"Who is that who just spoke?" he asked.

"A stranger, who has just come in and who has joined luck with me," replied Sam.

"He is a spy," said Marco.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; he was sent here by Flash to make friends with you and to betray you. I know it."

"Good! I'll keep an eye on him. Go, now. Where will you meet me with the men, and when?"

"In four days from now at sunset, but you must name the place."

"Do you know the Little Canyon?"

"No; but I can find it."

"Good—there, then."

With a bow, Marco against started for the door, but the lion opposed his exit.

A word from Sam, however, and he was permitted to pass.

Mexican Pete had been watching them narrowly during the talk in the corner, and when Marco left the saloon he hastened towards the door to follow.

But Cassius barred his exit.

With a muttered curse the man drew his revolver.

"Beware!" ordered Silver Sam. "If you raise that weapon, you die!"

Pete turned and saw that Sam had him covered.

With a curse, he returned the revolver to his belt.

"I want to go out," he said surlily.

"You cannot."

"Ain't this a free country?"

"No, not just at present," replied Sam dryly.

"Do you mean to keep me here against my Will?"

"For the present—yes."

"When I am on your side, too?"

"I don't know you well enough to trust you yet."

"Well, I'm going out."

"Not just now."

"Yes, now."

Mexican Pete's hand was being slowly raised, ostensibly to pass it over his cheek or brow, but really to seize the point of a knife which he carried between his shoulders, as is the habit of many Mexicans.

No one suspected his intention, and, least of all, Sam, who was, however, watching him narrowly.

"You cannot leave here without my permission," said Silver Sam.

"Curse you, take that!" cried Pete, and his hand flew forward.

But for the sagacity of the lion, Silver Sam would have had a narrow escape.

Cassius had watched the man closely ever since he had entered the saloon.

He saw the stealthy way in which the hand was raised to grasp the knife by the point in order to throw it, and his instinct told him that which man's intelligence could not discern.

Just as Pete grasped the point of the knife, Cassius leaped toward him, and as the hand flew forward in the act of throwing the weapon with unerring precision, the huge paws of the lion landed between his shoulders.

He was knocked down instantly, thus diverting his aim, while the terrible incisors of the faithful beast were buried in his neck.

CHAPTER XII.

AN OUTLAW IN SPITE OF HIMSELF.

It was but the work of an instant for Silver Sam to spring forward and give several sharp orders to the lion, at the same time striking him severely with his hand.

The huge beast, although enraged, obeyed his master, and desisted at once.

But although he had snapped at the fallen Mexican Pete but once, it was enough.

The wily rascal was dead.

The terrible jaws of the lion had severed the vertebræ at the base of the skull, and it had resulted in instant death to the man.

One glance was sufficient, and Silver Sam looked up coldly at the others who had crowded around.

"You see," he said, "that my warning was not idle. This man only attempted to injure me, and he is spared the wrath of Colonel Harrison. The teeth of Cassius are sharp and quick. Beware, all of you, lest you feel them in the future."

The men shuddered with terror, and well they might, for death by the jaws of a savage beast is perhaps the most horrible of all to contemplate.

Silver Sam saw the effect that the incident had wrought upon them, and resolved at once to profit by it.

"Cassius," he said sharply, and the intelligent animal looked quickly up at him.

"Those are my enemies," he continued, pointing to the marshal and his men; "they would slay me. Look well at them; mark them."

The men drew back precipitately. But Silver Sam continued:

"When next you see them—kill!"

Cassius crouched as if about to leap forward, and began lashing his tail against his sides.

The men, overcome with terror, rushed pellmell towards the further end of the room, and so well did Cassius understand the situation that it was with difficulty that Silver Sam restrained him from pouncing into their midst.

Silver Sam looked at his watch. Marco had gone a half hour.

"It is four o'clock," he said. "I have yet an hour to spare. I will go now. I warn you, do not attempt to follow, for once the outskirts of the town are reached I will not wait until five o'clock to begin shooting."

Then turning to Tom, Dick and Harry, he added:

"Come, we will leave here now."

Speaking a sharp word to Cassius, he bade the others precede, and then left the Golden Buck.

He paused in the doorway, and turned to give the marshal and his men a parting shot.

"Remember," he said, "those who hunt me, I will hunt. Those who seek to kill me, I will kill. Good-night, cut-throats!"

The next instant he was outside the door.

A horse wearing a huge Mexican saddle was tied near him.

It struck him instantly that the animal belonged to the man whom Cassius had slain.

"If so," he thought, "I will take him. Marco has mine, and this looks like a good one."

With Silver Sam to think was to act.

In a second he had untied the lariat and vaulted into the saddle.

"Hurry, men," he said, addressing his friends. "You have cast your fortunes with mine. Get your horses and meet me in fifteen minutes by the church of Santa Maria," referring to an old church which had long since fallen in ruins in the outskirts of Santa Fe.

The men obediently hurried away, and Silver Sam remained seated on the horse before the door of the saloon, with the lion crouching by his side.

He remained there until he felt assured that the men had received time enough to have gotten beyond the reach of the marshal and his men, and then he turned and rode slowly down the principal street.

He had not gone far when he encountered Colonel Harrison, who was also on horseback.

Silver Sam at once came to a halt.

"Colonel," he said, politely raising his hat, "I desire a word with you, if you will hear me."

"Speak!" said the colonel sternly, reining in his steed.

"You have done me a grievous wrong, sir," said Sam, "and some day you will realize it."

"Perhaps," he said coldly.

"You have made an outlaw of me, who never did a dishonest act in my life."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"You have put a price on my head, dead or alive, as though I were a common felon."

"I believe you to be one."

"Without even giving me the opportunity to prove my innocence?"

"Give yourself up to me now, and you shall have the opportunity," said the colonel dryly.

For an instant Sam hesitated.

Should he do so?

He remembered Ilda, and knew that he could not do so, at least, not without consulting her.

"Give me three days to think over your offer," he said.

"No, not one—not an hour."

Silver Sam bowed coldly.

"As you will, Colonel," he said. "You have made an outlaw of an honest man. You will yet regret it."

"Do you threaten?" asked the colonel coldly.

"No, I only warn you. You are a brave man, Colonel Harrison, but in this you are acting the part of a coward."

The colonel bowed coolly, and looked at his watch.

"You have yet fifty minutes in which to insult me," he said icily. "Have you more to say?"

"No, I have done."

With a cold bow the officer rode on, while Sam, putting spurs to the horse he bestrode, dashed away toward the place where he was to meet his friends.

They were there when he arrived, and bidding them follow, Silver Sam dashed on toward the mountains.

From the moment when he had parted with Colonel Harrison a resolution had formed itself in his mind.

He already had three men, and Marco would bring him more. How many he did not know, but undoubtedly enough for the purpose he had in view.

"They will hunt me like a criminal," he muttered. "They make an outcast and a felon of me. The very man whom I had resolved to befriend is the one who has done this. Col. Harrison! Bah! My revenge upon him shall be forgiveness, for he believes he is doing right. He shall go unharmed.

"But for the others—those scoundrels who will seek my life for the two thousand dollars in gold—let them beware! There shall be no forgiveness for them, or for that fiend in human guise and his Crimson League.

"But I must not slay him. He must be made to speak first. The secret that he holds is dearer to me than his worthless life—and to think that he and I are——"

"Silver," cried one of the men, "the hounds are on our track!"

Silver Sam looked quickly back over the trail.

It was true.

Something more than a mile behind them and just leaving the confines of Santa Fe were a score or more of horsemen.

"It is the marshal and his men," said Sam coolly.

"Aye, they are after us," said he who was called Dick. "In my mind, our chances of gittin' away air slim."

"Think so?" asked Sam. "Are you sorry you joined me?"

"Not a bit, pard. I ain't afeared o' them galoots, only I think I kin see a large-sized scrappin' match in ther dim distance."

Silver Sam smiled.

"We have yet a half an hour before they will try to overtake us," he said, "and just when they think that they have got us for sure, they'll get left."

The men began to feel confidence in their new leader. He was so cool and determined that they could not help it.

On they dashed, neither slackening their pace nor increasing it.

"Do you see that butte?" asked Sam, pointing ahead of them about three miles.

The men assented.

"Well, just beyond it is a huge arroya (dry river bed, or wash-out by cloud-burst). It extends about half a mile, and is plenty deep enough to hide us from view, and it passes the upper end of the timber. By obliquing to the right when we pass the butte, we can strike a place where we can enter it, and while they are looking for our trail on the hard soil we will come out at the other end. That will give us start enough so that we can keep ahead of them until dark."

Starting their horses ahead at a little sharper pace, they made all speed towards the timber. There was no use in stopping to fight in the face of such overwhelming odds, and none knew that fact better than Silver Sam.

The only way was to outwit their pursuers.

On they hastened, and at last they had dashed around it and were in sight of the men who were pursuing them.

But their escape was not to be so easy as Silver Sam had thought, for no sooner were they well around the belt of woods than they came face to face with a most surprising encounter.

Drawn up in line, as though awaiting them, and scarcely a hundred yards distant, was an entire company of cavalry, while near them and conversing with the captain in command, was Albert Belknap, otherwise Captain Flash.

There they were, forming seemingly an impassable barrier.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BOLD DASH.

The very first thing Silver Sam did when, upon dashing around the timber, he came full upon a company of U. S. Cavalry, was to look at his watch.

There was yet a little time to spare before five o'clock, and he resolved upon the instant to make the most of it.

Waving his hat high above his head, he shouted so that every man in the company could hear him:

"There are yet ten minutes before any member of your company will dare to molest me, and I will kill the first man who attempts to follow me before that time!"

Wheeling his horse suddenly, he dashed into the timber, closely followed by the three men, who began to think that they had, indeed, got themselves into a pickle when they joined forces with Silver Sam of Santa Fe.

But the resources of Sam were not exhausted yet.

He was never at a loss for some way out of a dilemma, and upon the very instant when he saw that his first plan was rendered totally useless, another one rushed into his brain.

"Courage, boys," he said, as they dashed into the timber. "They haven't called the turn on me yet."

"Waal," answered Dick, "ef ye kin see a way outer this scrape, ye've got purty good eyes."

"There is just one chance for us," returned Sam.

"Wot's that?"

"An old hunter friend of mine who turned up his toes two years ago, told me of a spot in this very timber where he had often hidden from the Indians. If I can find it we are saved; if not——"

"We're goners!"

"Exactly."

"Waal, Silver, ye've got about er minute an' a quarter in which ter locate ther claim."

"More than that, Dick. I think I can find it without trouble."

They dashed on, but with every instant the woods became thicker and more difficult for their horses to penetrate.

Suddenly Silver Sam came to a halt.

"All right, boys," he cried. "This is the spot."

"Whar?" asked Dick.

"Dismount!" ordered Silver Sam.

In a trice the men were on the ground.

"Remove saddles and bridles!" was the next command.

"Say, Silver," ejaculated Dick, "hev we gotter abandon the hosses?"

"For the present—yes."

"All right, if it's orders."

The saddles were quickly removed, and then bidding the men to wait where they were, Silver Sam led the horse that he had ridden to a natural clearing about twenty rods away.

The other horses followed, as a matter of course.

Leaving them there, Sam returned quickly to the spot where he had left his friends.

"We have got but a moment to spare," he said. "Follow me!"

"But these hosses?"

"Must trust to luck."

With their saddles slung over their shoulders, the four, with Silver Sam in the lead, then plunged into a thicket, which appeared to an unpracticed eye almost impenetrable.

They had not gone far when Silver Sam came to a halt.

Before him was a huge tree, long since dead.

Hastily pulling a compass from his pocket, Silver Sam stepped off thirty paces directly to the north.

Then he fell upon his knees, and after overturning the leaves and earth for the depth of six inches, he gave an exclamation of delight.

He had found an iron ring concealed beneath the rotting twigs and leaves.

Seizing the ring, he gave a sharp pull, and, much to the surprise of his companions, a square section, seemingly of earth, was raised in the form of a trap door.

"Down, every one of you!" he cried.

They were not slow to obey, and one after the other leaped into the opening thus made.

Seizing a handful of leaves and twigs and arranging them upon the edge of the trap so that it would conceal the disturbance he had made, Silver Sam sprang into the opening and lowered the door over him.

The men found themselves in a place of total darkness, where the air was almost stifling, but each and all felt that they had found a place of safety for the time being.

Silver Sam struck a light, and by it they found that they were in a pit scarcely large enough to hold them all, but yet, for a time at least, sufficient for their need.

Silver Sam explained that he had once saved the life of an old hunter in that neighborhood, who had revealed to him the existence of the pit which he had dug.

It was nothing more nor less than a square hole in the ground with almost no ventilation, but it formed a secure hiding place for several hours.

"We can make it answer our needs by raising the trap a little now and then for air," concluded Sam. "They will search for us, and find our horses, but they will not find us. We may have to leave here on foot, and our enemies will, in all probability, be on the watch for us, but we can outwit them, I think."

An hour passed by.

Several times they heard the step of searchers over their heads, and once the neigh of a horse.

Aye, again they heard a consultation between the town marshal and Belknap, both of whom stood exactly upon the trap door while talking.

"They have found a hiding place in the woods," said Belknap.

"Sure!" replied the marshal.

"And one which we cannot find."

"That's so, too."

"There is only one thing left for us to do."

"What's that?"

"Leave their horses where they are. Send our own to Santa Fe with the cavalry, and with your men surround the grove."

"We will lie flat on our faces and wait. By and by they will come out. Their horses will be O. K., and they will think that we have given up the chase and gone—see?"

"I do," said the marshal.

"They will mount their horses and ride out, and then we can pick them off beautifully."

"Good!"

"So it is agreed?"

"You bet!"

Then the two plotters went on their way.

They had arranged a shrewd scheme, and one which might have worked had not their conversation happened to take place exactly over the trap door beneath which our hero and his friends were concealed.

As it was, our friends were warned, and, therefore, knew how to act.

The air in the dug-out became stifling, and presently Silver Sam raised the trap door a little.

Darkness had settled down over the land, but a glance overhead assured our hero that away from the shelter of the woods the world was nearly as light as day, owing to a cloudless sky and a clear, bright moon.

"Come, boys," he said. "You may leave the dug-out in safety now. The hunters after human game are no longer in the woods. They are awaiting us out in the open."

They left the shelter of the pit and made their way cautiously to the edge of the timber.

All was silent, and apparently there was not a human being within miles.

But our friends knew better.

They had overheard the plot to entrap them.

If they had not they might have ridden out and been shot without mercy.

For a long time they watched the plain narrowly, but not a sign of their foes could be seen.

"Boys," said Silver Sam, "there are at least twenty men, and perhaps fifty, lying out there waiting for us. There are two courses, either of which we can adopt."

"What's them?" asked the man called Tom.

"We can stay here and remain concealed until they get tired and leave, taking our horses with them, or we can mount and make a dash for liberty. I will leave it to you."

"By stayin' here we're sure to lose our hosses," said one.

"Certain," commented Sam.

"Waal, I vote to make a dash for it!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

"Good!" cried Silver Sam. "It is the course which I prefer, but I felt that you ought to decide. Since you all agree with me, go and saddle the horses and bring them here. I will keep watch."

Then he continued:

"There is no better place than this to make the attempt, for we can dash around the head of the arroyo. Once out

of range and we are safe, for they have sent their horses on to Santa Fe."

The three departed, leaving Silver Sam at his post, but he neither saw nor heard anything which could give him a clew as to the location of the his enemies.

When the men returned with the horses they mounted silently.

Then the generalship of Silver Sam came into play.

He ordered Tom to remain where he was.

Dick was posted eight or ten rods further along.

Then came Harry, and, lastly, at the point at which he considered most dangerous, Silver Sam.

The cry of an owl was to be the signal for the dash, and as soon as Silver Sam had reached his position he gave it.

In an instant the four riders had dashed out upon the plain, each aiming at a distant mountain, which could be plainly seen against the moonlit sky.

For fully twenty rods they rode on in apparent security, and some of them began to think that the plan which they had overheard had been abandoned.

But they were destined to disappointment.

A loud report rang out on the air.

It was quickly followed by another, and then another, until the air seemed to ring with the explosions of rifles.

Still on they flew.

The head of the arroyo was reached. They doubled it.

The rifle reports still rang out sharply, and still the four venturesome riders dashed on.

But they were not destined to escape untouched.

As they reached the head of the arroyo the man Tom suddenly gave a loud cry.

He reeled in his saddle, and then fell with a crash to the earth.

At the same instant the horse of Mexican Pete's, which Silver Sam bestrode, was fatally hit.

They were, however, nearly out of range.

With a bound, Silver Sam sprang from his fallen horse, and succeeded in grasping the saddle pommel of Tom's horse.

With another he gained the seat, and then the three who had escaped dashed away over the plains.

For a time at least they were safe.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

Colonel Harrison was sitting alone in his quarters one evening nearly a month later than the events recorded in our last chapter.

Every effort to capture Silver Sam, dead or alive, had proved fruitless, and the gallant colonel had just dismissed Albert Belknap, with whom he had been in frequent consultation during the period that had elapsed.

Silver Sam had outwitted them at every turn.

More than that, he had become so powerful that the colonel was at that moment thinking over the advisability of sending out a regular detachment of his regiment with instructions to capture the bold man at all hazards.

The situation was extremely annoying to the soldierly ability of a man like Colonel Harrison.

At times he could not avoid a feeling that he had done wrong in so hastily passing judgment upon the person of Silver Sam, but whenever that sentiment became forcible enough to lead him to think seriously of making some fair proposition to the man he had outlawed, the smooth tongue and carefully prepared lies of Albert Belknap again turned the channel of his thoughts in the opposite direction.

There was one thing distinctly in favor of his best conclusions regarding Silver Sam.

The Crimson League had time and time again made some bold raids upon the settlers or miners in the vicinity, and had as many times been beaten off and foiled by the advent of a party headed by a man who proclaimed himself Silver Sam of Santa Fe.

Belknap had offset these incidents in Silver Sam's favor by declaring that it was only a clever ruse by which our hero meant to avert suspicion from his real organization, and up to the moment of which we write the colonel had been deceived.

But he was beginning to be shaken in his belief.

It was well known to him that Silver Sam had a force of men under his command numbering nearly a score, but as yet there was no satisfactory proof that he was in any way connected with the Crimson League.

Indeed, what little evidence existed on that point was inclined the other way, and the colonel felt himself to be in a quandary.

There was another thing which was worrying him.

He had received intelligence that quite a force of Confederate cavalry was approaching Santa Fe, with the avowed intention of seizing the town, and as his information told him that the Confederate force was much larger than his own, he had no resource but to retreat in the event of such an occurrence.

Reinforcements were out of the question.

There was no way of sending dispatches, except by means of a personal messenger, and the colonel knew that long before his messenger could arrive at his destination, the Confederates would be upon him, if, indeed, their objective point was Santa Fe.

There was, therefore, so much upon his mind which required careful thought and consideration that the colonel did not hear a low tap upon the door of his room.

Indeed, he did not know that any one was near him until the door opened and the form of a youth in Mexican garb stood before him.

The colonel started to his feet with a sharp exclamation.

"Who are you, sir?" he ejaculated, "and how did you get in here without being announced?"

"I am Marco," replied the youth calmly, "and as for getting in here—bah! Your guard would permit a regiment to pass without a challenge."

The colonel was astounded.

That his sentinels should be derelict in their duty was an overwhelming piece of intelligence.

"Your business?" he said coldly.

"I bring a letter from one whom you deem your enemy."

"From whom?"

"Silver Sam of Santa Fe."

The colonel bounded to his feet, but the quick eye of Marco had foreseen the officer's impulse.

His pistol was pointing straight at Colonel Harrison's heart.

"Before you call the guard read this letter," he said coldly. "At the first cry of alarm I will fire. If when you have read you can have the heart to place me under arrest I will submit."

There was no help for it.

The colonel took the letter and read.

With each paragraph Marco saw that his face underwent a change, but if he expected to hear more than cold comments and questions resulting from the contents of the document he was disappointed.

Colonel Harrison was a man who never allowed his feelings or impulses to express themselves either in his face or voice.

That the document was a surprise to the officer there could be no doubt.

"This letter tells me strange things," he said coldly, looking up after he had read it to the end.

Marco bowed.

"It informs me that the writer is possessed of secrets which I supposed were in my keeping only."

Marco bowed again.

"It reiterates the assertion that Albert Kelknap is the real Captain Flash."

The colonel paused and looked sharply at his caller before he spoke again.

Then he said slowly:

"It refers to a place in the Little Canyon, which the writer says is known to me also. Do you know what that means, young sir?"

"I am only the bearer of the letter, Colonel," replied Marco calmly. "You must look for further information from Silver Sam."

"Who are you?" asked the colonel, regarding him closely.

"I am Marco. Nothing more."

"Have you a sister?"

Marco started, and colored.

"I await your answer to the letter," he said coldly. "There is yet another part of it to which you have not referred."

"Ah! You know the contents, then?"

"I do."

"Silver Sam says that Santa Fe will be in the hands of the Confederates in less than a week. Is that true?"

"Aye, if Silver Sam says so?"

"Have you any further business with me than the delivery of this letter?"

"No."

"You may go, then. I will respect the request of your commander and permit you to depart."

"Is there no answer?"

"No."

"Do you still refuse to do justice where justice is due?"

"Go!" said the colonel sharply, and Marco went.

But long after he had left the officer's quarters, the colonel sat lost in thought.

"Am I right or am I wrong?" he mused. "Is this 'cave of the lions' the spot which is so important for me to find? And this boy Marco. Who is he? Can it be that he is her brother?"

* * * * *

Marco had just returned to the cave of the lions after bearing the message to Colonel Harrison.

In the outer cave the men were grouped together, indolent and awaiting orders.

In the inner cave Ilda and Silver Sam were talking together when Marco arrived.

The red giant, who for a month had been chained up like a wild beast to the rock, was pacing to and fro, restlessly and savagely, for his wounds were nearly healed.

"Well?" asked Sam, as Marco entered, for he did not suspect that his lieutenant was other than he seemed. Ilda alone knew that Marco was a girl, and she had promised to keep the secret.

"No news," replied Marco. "I had as soon deal with the rocks of this cave as with Colonel Harrison."

"Then we must strike alone," said Sam.

Marco nodded.

Suddenly there was a loud shout from the outer cave, and one and all started quickly to their feet.

The cause was soon explained.

Red Beard, the giant, had succeeded in breaking his chain.

It had all taken place so quickly, and the men were so unprepared, that before they could do anything to prevent it

he had knocked two of them senseless and had dashed down the narrow passage.

They gave chase at once, but when the canyon was reached the giant had disappeared.

"We are safe here no longer," said Silver Sam. "Old Red Beard is crazy, but he is in sympathy with the Crimson League. By to-night they will be upon us."

"Then why not anticipate them and make the attempt at once?" asked Marco boldly.

"It shall be done," replied Silver Sam.

Marco's eyes shone brilliantly.

"Silver Sam," he said, "when I first thought to appeal to you I did not know that your quest and mine were the same."

"The same!" cried Sam. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," replied Marco slowly, "that your search here is for certain papers that are concealed somewhere in those caves. Ilda, your sister, has heard my story. Ask her if I speak truly."

Silver Sam turned to his sister, who bowed an assent.

Marco continued:

"I have in my possession the plan which will lead us to the secret. Yonder in the dark room which we do not use is a concealed passage which will not only lead us to the secret, but, I believe, into the very stronghold of the Crimson League."

"And you have kept it secret all this time?"

"Because I had not been able to find the passage. Just before I went to Santa Fe I found it."

"Albert Belknap, alias Captain Flash, is your uncle. Am I right?"

Silver Sam bowed.

He was about to speak, but at that instant there was a terrible explosion in the outer cave, instantly followed by the quick report of firearms and the shouts of men in combat.

Brutus and Cassius leaped to their feet, and roared furiously.

With a loud cry, Silver Sam leaped through the connecting passage, removing the wedge which held the rock in place as he did so.

The rock rolled into place, effectually shutting off communication with the inner cave, and our hero found himself in the midst of a dense smoke, through which he could discern nothing.

The next instant he received a sharp blow upon his head, and fell senseless to the floor of the cavern.

CHAPTER XV.

AT THE MERCY OF THE GIANT.

Marco and Ilda were left alone in the inner cave.

Neither of them knew what had happened, nor what to do.

It must be remembered by the reader that they were both girls.

When the explosion took place Silver Sam had bounded through the opening between the two caves, had loosened the wedge which fastened the rock between them, and had therefore allowed it to drop into place, effectually closing the passageway.

The two girls looked at each other in terror.

They drew near to the rock, and listened intently.

For several moments they could hear the sounds of combat going on in the outer cave, and Marco would have thrown open the rocky gateway and gone out had not Ilda restrained him.

We speak of Inez as Marco, because it is necessary to the

plot of our story, but, of course, the reader understands that Marco and Inez are one and the same.

"Ilda," she said at last, "are you brave?"

"I fear not," replied the sister of Silver Sam.

"But where the life of your brother is involved——"

"I would dare anything."

"I thought so. Come!"

Together they returned to the inner cave, closing and wedging the rock behind them.

As soon as they were safely there Marco drew a paper from her bosom and spread it open before her companion.

"Here," she said, "is the plan of the cave. How it came into my possession I will not tell you now."

"Of what avail is it?" asked Ilda.

"It will lead us to your brother—to Silver Sam," replied Marco.

Ilda burst into tears, and Brutus, looking at her, growled fiercely.

"Tell me what you mean," she said.

"No; I will show you instead," answered Marco. "Take the light and follow."

Ilda complied, and Marco led the way into the dark room.

Pausing in the center, she studied the diagram carefully for several moments.

Then, as though entirely satisfied, she went swiftly to a huge boulder which jutted up from near the further corner and tried to remove it.

But her strength was not sufficient.

Calling Ilda to her aid, they together exerted all their strength, pushing against the boulder with all their might.

Presently it move a little, then more, and finally it rolled easily aside, disclosing a dark and narrow passage, scarcely wide enough for one person to pass through without effort.

Ilda started back in alarm, but Marco was not to be frightened.

"Come!" she cried, seizing the light. "We will follow this passage, and we will rescue Silver Sam from the hands of his enemies. Come! Follow me!"

At times it led them down a steep incline, and then up again.

At last they came to abrupt pause.

Before them arose a smooth wall with seemingly no way of passing it.

Marco referred to the plan, but it gave no way of passing the barrier.

In despair they were about to turn back to seek for some other passageway, when Ilda chanced to lean against the impediment to their progress.

Instantly she felt that it moved beneath her weight.

Calling the attention of Marco to the fact, she pressed harder and harder, when suddenly, much to the surprise of both, it revolved, and they found that a much broader and higher passageway was opened before them.

They passed through, leaving the way open behind them, and in a moment more they found themselves in a room which seemed to have been hewn out of the solid rock of the mountain.

Both uttered exclamations of wonder as they gazed around them.

Did I say that the room seemed hewn from the rock? Rather was it hewn from a solid block of virgin silver.

It was wonderful, fascinating. Upon every side shone the precious metal in solid masses.

The very floor beneath their feet was of silver, while piled in negligent profusion upon every side were chunks and bars of the valuable metal in the shapes and forms in which they had been taken from the walls.

The place was veritably a room of solid silver.

The two girls looked upon it in awe.

"The treasure room!" gasped Ilda. "The place for which Sam has been searching so long in vain. Not that he might secure the wealth so much as for the secret which lies buried here."

Marco gazed at her friend in silence for a moment.

She seemed about to pursue the subject, but a thought changed her mind.

"Come," she cried. "Our first duty is to find your brother; after that we will look for the secret. The life of Silver Sam is worth more than all this wealth, is it not, Ilda?"

"Aye, a thousand times!"

"Ten thousand!"

Ilda looked quickly at her friend.

"You love Sam?" she said simply.

"I do," replied Marco.

"And does he know——"

"He knows nothing," interrupted the disguised Inez. "To him I am Marco, and so I must remain until I see fit to throw aside this disguise. You will not betray me, Ilda?"

"No, never!"

"Come!" cried the brave girl. "I believe that this passage will lead us to the cave of the Crimson League. There we shall find Silver Sam a prisoner in the hands of his worst enemy. But we will save him. Come, Ilda."

They turned to go, but stopped, appalled.

A wild, demoniacal laugh rang through the cavern, and they started back in affright.

And well they might.

Before them, brandishing a huge red knife, and effectually barring their progress, stood Red Beard, the giant.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE SPANISH MINE.

We left Marco and Ilda in the treasure room of the wonderful cave, and before them, menacing their lives, had suddenly appeared the huge giant who had once before so narrowly escaped death at the attack made upon him by Brutus.

They were too nearly overcome with terror to move, or even to drop them to the floor.

Suddenly, however, the real bravery of Marco's heart returned.

With a quick motion she drew her revolver, and before the huge, red-bearded villain comprehended even that she had one in her possession, she had raised it and fired.

Taught by long practice on the border, there were few men who could shoot better than Marco.

The ball went true to its aim, or so nearly so that it served the purpose for which it was intended.

Without a sigh or a groan, Red Beard sank to the floor senseless, and they believed him dead.

He lived, however, for the ball, instead of penetrating his brain, had grazed his skull, inflicting an ugly wound, to be sure, but not necessarily a fatal one.

Still they did not stop to examine him.

Marco, knowing well her own expertness with the pistol, believed she had killed the man, and beyond a shudder of regret, paid no more attention to him.

"He did not come here by the passage we followed," she said, "and we have only to find his route in order to proceed upon our way."

They hastened toward the corner from which he had seemed to make his appearance, and there they found the companion passage to the one by which they had entered.

"Ought we not to close the way to our own cave?" sug-

gested Ilda timidly. "If we do not return this way it will keep our secret."

The thought was a good one, and Marco went back to close the rocky door.

As she was about to do so she fancied that she heard a noise, and calling Ilda they listened intently.

Yes, there was no mistake. They could plainly hear a whining sound far back in the passageway.

"The lions!" cried Ilda. "What shall we do?"

"Go back for them," replied Marco. "They are shut off somewhere in the narrow passage."

The reinforcement was too great to be disregarded, and they hurried back along the narrow corridor.

It was as they had suspected.

Both Brutus and Cassius had been shut off from following them, for the stone which they had thrust aside had dropped back into place.

It required their united efforts to remove it, but they succeeded.

I will not worry the reader by a lengthened account of how they made their way once more to the treasure room, where the two animals growled over the senseless form of Red Beard.

They passed on through the passageway, which wound in seeming circles and darted off at tangents and angles, until they became so bewildered that they lost all trace of the route they had taken.

But fate was kind to them.

Where many times the two brave girls might have been irretrievably lost in the maze of passages and corridors, they nevertheless kept the right way, until at last they found themselves within a large apartment not unlike the treasure room.

But, search as they might, they could find no means of egress save that by which they had entered.

In the very center of the room was a square block of stone, different in color from any other there, at which the lion, Brutus, was constantly sniffing as if it concealed something which he wished to find.

Marco bent over and examined it closely.

In an instant she had bounded to her feet.

"There are holes in the edges of the stone, made for fingers!" she cried. "Oh, Ilda, if we can only lift it, I am certain that we shall find a passage underneath."

The feat looked hopeless of accomplishment by two slender girls, for the stone seemed large and solid.

Nevertheless they essayed it, and in another instant were astounded at the result.

The stone moved easily.

The strength of one of them was entirely sufficient to have moved from its bed, but underneath it there was nothing but a solid mass of rock.

They looked at each other in despair.

Ilda shivered. She thought that a draught of cold air had touched her, and she looked around in the place in wonder.

Suddenly she gave a loud cry of joy.

Before them, wide open, stood a doorway.

How had it been opened so mysteriously? Had it been there all the while, and had they failed to discover it?

The lions were already at the opening, and the girls quickly followed.

In another instant they had passed through.

Before they had traversed a hundred yards in what was now a broad and high corridor, they discovered that they no longer needed their lights.

There were lights shining ahead of them.

Believing that they were approaching some opening, they extinguished those which they carried.

At last they reached a point where it became evident that they must stop.

Leaving Cassius with Ilda, Marco crept cautiously forward alone.

In a moment more she reached a sharp bend in the corridor, and there she paused suddenly, placing her hand over her mouth in order to keep back a sharp cry of delight.

She had found the object of her search.

Before her, in a large, lighted room, bound, helpless and carelessly thrown down, were Silver Sam of Santa Fe and the men who belonged to his band.

Prisoners, all of them, but for what fate?

She was soon to know, for even as she looked the figure of Captain Flash appeared.

CHAPTER XVII.

TO THE RESCUE.

"Well, Sammy," said Flash, with a malicious smile upon his face, as he walked into the cavern where Silver Sam was lying bound and helpless, "do you feel in a communicative mood to-day?"

Silver Sam looked coldly at his captor, but vouchsafed no reply.

"Evidently not," continued the smooth-tongued villain, "and yet I fancy I can make you speak out a little. You are utterly in my power, for once, and for the first time, too. How do you like being called Captain Flash, eh? The name rather fits you, for you are a flash young man."

"What a consummate villain you are, Albert!" said Silver Sam, with in tense scorn.

The outlaw laughed.

"You are proud of your relative, are you not, Sammy?"

"Bah!" said Silver Sam. "What do you want with me? Tell me your purpose and begone."

"Good! You are beginning to talk business. I've got some questions to ask you."

"Ask them."

"The first is this," said Flash, in a lower tone, and stooping nearer to his position. "Where is Lorna Mayhew?"

"I can't answer that, because I don't know," replied Sam. "I have searched everywhere for traces of her, but without success. If I knew, I wouldn't tell you, but I don't know."

Flash frowned.

"I believe you," he said, "but your lack of knowledge leads to another query, not originally counted. Will you at once abandon your search for her?"

"No."

"Reflect, Sammy, and answer me later in the day."

"The next question is: Have you yet found your way to the wealth which we both know is stored in this mountain; and, if not, will you abandon your search for it at once?"

"No, to both!" replied Silver Sam sharply.

"Reflect again, Sammy, while I give you the third. Who is Inez Sepulvida?"

Silver Sam looked thoroughly astonished; so much so that even Flash was surprised, while Inez herself, who the reader remembers was in hiding where she could hear every word that was uttered, pressed her hand quickly over her heart to still its loud beating.

"I see that you do not know," continued the outlaw.

"I never heard of her," replied Silver Sam.

"It is hard to believe you a liar," continued Flash coolly, "but I am forced to that conclusion. My information is correct, and I know that when she escaped me she went to you."

"I fail to comprehend you," said Silver Sam.

"Did a Mexican youth come to you at the Golden Buck the day that you were outlawed?"

"Yes."

"That was Inez. She had been my prisoner. She escaped, dressed as a boy, and I know that she went to the Golden Buck and talked with you. She left soon after. Where did she go?"

"I do not know."

"Another lie, Sammy. Who is she? I have my own suspicions, but I want to know from your lips."

"Your questions are riddles. I cannot answer them."

"Very well; I will tell you. Inez Sepulvida is none other than Lorna Mayhew."

Silver Sam started until he almost burst his bonds.

"And Marco is Inez!" he muttered.

"So!" he cried, "she is with you still, and you call her Marco! It is well. I will return to your cave in the canyon, Silver Sam, and I will find her and bring her here if I have to dig up the mountain. Aye, and your sister, also."

"Fiend!" muttered Silver Sam.

"Thanks! Now listen! I will bring them here, and in the meantime you may think over the conditions of your liberty. If you refuse I swear that you shall be shot as an outlaw, while Ilda——"

"What of her?" cried Sam.

"She," said Flash, with a malicious chuckle, "shall be queen of the Crimson League."

"Monster!" cried Silver Sam, struggling in vain to burst his bonds. "Would you so wrong your own——"

"My own niece? Certainly, Sammy, just as I will shoot my own nephew. Horrible, isn't it? So long! I am going now. Think over the conditions until I return."

So saying, he disappeared through the passageway by which he had entered, leaving Silver Sam to the most bitter reflections.

A sentinel had entered the chamber as soon as Captain Flash departed, and was sitting near him, with his back towards the place where Marco was hiding.

Suddenly, as Silver Sam looked that way, he saw a movement of some kind in the opening beyond.

He started a little, for in the half light he saw a hand waved at him.

The other prisoners, who were lying near, had all along preserved a moody silence.

There were only five of them, so greatly had the force of Silver Sam been weakened by the terrible attack in the home cavern.

It so happened that our hero was the only one lying so that he could face the passageway where Marco was; he was the only one who saw her hand as she waved it to him.

His heart throbbed violently.

What was it that he saw?

He did not know. He could not believe that it was the signal of a friend, and yet, what else?

Suddenly he almost cried out with astonishment, for he recognized the figure of Marco as it stole silently forward, so silently that not a sound broke the stillness of the cavern chamber.

Silver Sam held his breath, in the nearest approach to terror that he had ever felt, for now that he knew Marco's real identity his heart almost stood still.

The slightest noise would betray her presence.

Her foot might touch a projection in the rocky floor.

One of the men might roll over and see her, and cry out before thinking.

The sentinel himself might at any instant take it in his head to turn.

Then all would be lost.

It was a moment of frightful suspense, a moment of agony.

"What does she intend to do?" thought Silver Sam. "True, the sentinel is here alone, but there are twenty or thirty men within sound of his voice, without doubt. How did she get there? Where is Ilda?"

A thousand answerable questions rushed through his mind. Nearer and nearer crept Marco.

She paused when at last she was just behind the unsuspecting sentinel.

She slowly raised her right arm; her hand grasped the barrel of a huge pistol.

The sentinel, as though intuitively scenting the presence of danger, started to spring to his feet.

As he did so the arm fell, and the blow was sure and severe.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE.

The butt of the pistol in the hand of Marco struck the sentinel full upon his temple, and even in the attempt to rise he sank down to the floor of the cavern chamber, stunned and senseless, and without having uttered a sound.

All who were lying there bound heard the noise of the blow, but the clear tones of Marco cautioned them to silence. "Not a sound!" he said authoritatively, and they obeyed.

In an instant she was at the side of Silver Sam, and in the next his bonds were severed, and he arose to his feet.

Possessing himself quickly of the sentinel's arms, he then bounded to the friends who had been captured with him.

It was but the work of a moment to free them also.

Then, although he was still unconscious, they bound and gagged the sentinel.

But the weapons which were in the possession of Silver Sam and Marco were the only ones in the party.

The others were unarmed.

With a quick motion Marco signified that they were to follow, and then she dashed once more into the dark passage.

The next moment he who had been the sentinel was the only prisoner left in that cavern chamber.

"Foiled again, Captain Flash," muttered Silver Sam. "The next time we meet I think it will be you who falls."

They soon encountered Ilda and the lions, and then they took their way hurriedly on through the passage, the light having been brought again into use.

Many hours were spent in traversing the ground which the two girls had gone over in a little more than two.

Suddenly Marco and Ilda cried out joyously.

The treasure room was before them.

They flew to the spot where Red Beard had fallen, but he had disappeared.

Not a trace of him was to be found, except a few spots of blood upon the floor.

The door leading into the treasure room from the home cavern was open.

The giant had gone that way; the drops of blood which had fallen from his wound proved that.

It was another cause for alarm, and a serious one, and yet they could not repress exclamations of amazement as they gazed upon that wondrous chamber, which seemed as though hewn from a solid block of silver.

It was as though Nature had created a resort in the wilds of these mountains, and had poured molten concentrations of her hoarded wealth into that one spot.

Silver above them—silver below them—silver upon every side!

Nay, more!

Piled in the corners and against the sides of the chamber were hundreds of irregular-shaped blocks of the precious metal, just as they had been with pick and crowbar as well as with the primitive tools of the Spanish miner detached from the mass upon every side.

There was the ransom of nations, the fortunes of kings and emperors—the wealth of all the world.

It seemed inexhaustible, endless.

The men, forgetting their danger, fell upon their knees and clasped huge bricks of silver, weighing from two to twenty pounds each, in their arms, and hugged them with delight.

They cried like babies in their ecstasy.

Fortunes were made for one and all.

They knew it! They knew it!

"Be men!" cried Silver Sam at last. "Remember your danger!"

They looked at him vacantly. They had no thought except for the fortune which they had found.

"Of what good is it all," cried Sam again, "if Captain Flash should find us here? If we were armed we could protect it, but we are not. Do you want to see it taken from you ere it is yours? Be men! Come! Leave it all and follow me!"

They obeyed. They saw the logic of his words.

But they broke one of the bricks into a thousand pieces over another, and with the fragments stuffed their pockets full.

Silver Sam, followed by Marco and Ilda, was already hurrying along the passageway, and the men soon followed.

But already their thirst for wealth had crazed them.

Each one resolved that all the others should die, that he alone might possess all that vast wealth.

Silver Sam passed on, and at last they emerged into the dark room, which was a part of the cave where he had made his home.

Cautioning the others to wait, our hero crept softly forward.

Not a sound fell upon his ears; the cave was deserted.

The stone connecting with the outer cave had been removed from the aperture.

Red Beard, the giant, had probably gone that way.

Aye, more!

As Silver Sam looked around he found that the cavern had been ransacked, and that everything of value had been removed.

"Flash has been here and gone!" he said; "but he will return. We have no time to lose!"

It was true, they had not, for at that very instant Captain Flash was hurrying back through the fissure which led from the valley in the mountains to the Little Canyon.

He had resolved to search the cavern again.

His prisoners had escaped!

A strong force was searching for them in his own retreat, and he had conceived the idea that the caves were joined in some mysterious manner.

At all events, he was resolved to guard them both.

If our friends were to escape, they had no time to lose.

They did not know how short it was, but, unarmed as they were, Silver Sam realized that every instant added to their danger ten-fold.

With a loud warning for the others to follow, he led the way through the outer room and down the narrow passage which opened into the place which he had used as a stable.

There was one horse there, the one which belonged to Silver Sam—the one which Marco had used ever since the day in the Golden Buck, when she had gone to bring him assistance.

Silver Sam's plan was hurriedly made when he beheld the horse.

"Marco," he said, turning quickly, "I know that you are not what you seem, that you are Inez Sepulvida, a girl. Indeed, I

even believe that the name I mentioned last does not belong to you, but of that you know no more than I."

Then he continued:

"There is no time for explanations now, for you and Ilda must fly."

"Fly, and leave you?"

"Even so. Do not fear for me. I know passes in these mountains where a goat could not find me. Mount and away!"

"But where?" cried Ilda.

"To Santa Fe!" cried Sam quickly.

With a quick motion he unclasped a gold chain from his neck, to which was attached a locket.

He handed it to Marco.

"Take that," he said, "to Colonel Harrison. Tell him that it comes from Silver Sam of Santa Fe, who claims protection for the two beings upon earth whom he most dearly loves."

Marco blushed hotly.

"But the colonel is your enemy," she faltered.

"He will be so no longer when he sees that. Away!"

In an instant they were mounted, and without waiting for a word, even of farewell, Silver Sam struck the horse smartly on the flank, and he bounded away down the canyon.

At the same instant Brutus and Cassius started away with them.

"Go, boys, go!" shouted Sam, realizing that the faithful animals would guard the girls well.

The next instant he turned to hasten away, wondering where the men were.

But he was soon to know.

He heard a sharp swish through the air, and dodged.

But not soon enough.

The loop of a lariat settled over his head, and he was jerked suddenly to the ground, stunned, senseless.

Then two men stepped from behind the rocks and bent over him gloatingly.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CURSE OF RICHES.

Although Silver Sam was stunned when he was dragged down by the lariat after the girls left him, it was only for an instant.

He almost immediately opened his eyes, fully expecting to see himself once more in the grasp of that dreaded Captain Flash.

But instead he saw in the two faces which were leaning over him the features of his own men.

"What does this mean?" he cried. "Didn't you know me, boys?"

"Aye, we knowed you well enough," replied one of them, with a leer.

"But why did you attack me when your own lives are in danger?" asked Sam, bewildered by the incident.

"That will do, Cap'n. There ain't no danger, I reckon."

"Where are the rest of the boys?" asked Sam.

"Dead!" said the one who had already spoken.

"Dead! How? Who killed them?"

"We did!"

"You?"

"Yes. Thar was too many wot knowed 'bout thet air silver, an' they hed ter go under."

So saying, the man bent over and speedily removed the weapons which Sam had taken from the sentinel in the cave.

"Now say yer prayers," he said, leveling one of the pistols at Silver Sam's head, "'cos ye've got jest one minute ter live."

The pistol was aimed directly at his head.

The next instant there came a flash and a report, and Sam, instead of feeling the lead crashing through his own skull, heard a loud imprecation behind him.

The scoundrel, instead of shooting him, had raised the muzzle of the weapon just before pulling the trigger, so that the ball, instead of ending the life of Silver Sam, had struck the fellow's partner in crime.

"That air's strategy," he exclaimed exultantly. "Bill thought he war goin' ter share that boodle along o' me, but I says not much! Pard Silver, you 'n me's ther only ones left 'sides ther gals, wot knows about that lay-out, and now you've got ter go under. When thet's done, I'll fix the gals—see?"

The man raised the other pistol.

Sam did not speak.

Suddenly he heard a loud scream of agony.

He opened his eyes in wonder, just in time to see the man who would have murdered him stagger back and fall to the ground, as he clutched spasmodically at a huge red knife which had pierced his neck.

Then heard the rush of feet and felt himself lifted in a pair of strong arms and borne swiftly away.

The ordeal had been too terrible. Even his iron nerves could bear no more. He realized only that he was being carried back again into the cave, and then he fainted.

He did not even realize that it was Red Beard who had thrown the knife which had pierced the throat of the villain who had murdered him—that it was Red Beard who was bearing him so swiftly away.

Nor did they leave any too soon.

Scarcely had they disappeared when Captain Flash, followed by a dozen of his men fully armed, rushed into view.

Captain Flash bent over the form of the man last stricken down, and held the knife aloft to the gaze of his men.

"The Red Demon of the Cave!" they cried in one breath.

"Aye," cried Flash. "He has been here! This is one of his weapons. Perhaps he has done our work for us. Perhaps he has served them all like this one."

Flash seized a torch from the hand of one of his men and bounded into the cave, while the men reluctantly followed.

They had not gone far before they came upon another body, and then another.

The four men who had been prisoners with Sam were there, but Sam and Ilda were not to be found.

"Curse him!" said Flash, when he realized that fact. "Has he escaped me again? No, by heaven, he shall not! He is hiding somewhere in this cave, and I will find him."

They searched high and low, everywhere, but no trace of Silver Sam or the passage through the mountain could they find.

The dark room had not been neglected, but none of them had chanced upon the secret.

At last, in despair, Flash was about to post a guard at the mouth of the cave and return to his own quarters, when an accident revealed the very spot for which they were searching.

One of the men stumbled and fell, and in endeavoring to save himself, he touched the very point of rock which gave the secret away.

The next instant, with loud shouts of triumph, they went dashing along the passageway towards the treasure room.

Nor did they once pause.

Captain Flash felt that he had accomplished two things. He had found the way that would no doubt lead him, not only to the fugitives for whom he was in search, but also to the great treasure which he knew was hidden there.

"On, men!" he cried, and in a moment more they had burst into the glorious treasure room where the silver lay piled in such luxuriant heaps.

Then they, too, went mad over the discovery.

They wept; they embraced each other; they fell upon their hands and knees and hugged the chunks of silver with which the floor was strewn.

Instead of "Treasure Room," the cavern might properly have been termed "Mad Room."

Flash was the first to realize the folly of such conduct.

"Come, men!" he cried. "We have found the treasure. It is ours now. We will return here, and each one of you shall have a fortune from this room. Come, here is a way which must lead to our own retreat. Come!"

They obeyed.

They followed him into the passage; the same one which the girls had taken, and by which our friends had returned.

But a change had taken place since then, for Captain Flash and his men had not gone ten feet ere they fell upon a barrier of rock which barred their further progress.

They tried in every way to move it, but without avail.

Hours went by, and still they tried, but it was useless. The passage was closed against them.

CHAPTER XX.

TREACHERY.

The two girls, one in the garb of a Mexican youth, dashed on down the canyon, mounted upon the one horse, which by some oversight the men of the Crimson League had left.

Their united weight was but little more than that of Silver Sam, and the horse did not mind it in the least.

They gave him his head, and were soon out of the canyon and galloping over the rolling plains toward Santa Fe.

By nightfall they had entered the city of Santa Fe.

They rode straight down the principal street, and did not pause until they reached the door of Colonel Harrison's headquarters.

Springing from the saddle, Marco demanded to see the colonel at once, but even as she spoke, he came out of the door.

Without a word, she stepped forward and placed the gold chain and locket in his hand.

He glanced at them quickly.

"This! This!" he cried. "Where did you get this? Tell me quickly."

Marco looked up and said calmly:

"From Silver Sam of Santa Fe!"

Had a shell exploded over the head of Colonel Harrison he could not have been more thoroughly astonished than he was by the calm words of Marco, when she informed him that the chain and locket were sent to him by Silver Sam of Santa Fe.

"What!" he cried. "Did Silver Sam send this to me? Where did he get it?"

"That I do not know, sir," replied Marco. "He bade me place it in your hands and to say that he demanded protection for his sister Ilda, and for me."

"And you? Who are you?"

"Do you remember me?"

"No—yet stop! Yes, you brought me a message recently from Silver Sam."

"I did. I then gave my name as Marco."

Again did the colonel start back in surprise.

"What is your name?"

"Colonel Harrison, I am Inez Sepulvida."

In another moment, with the lions still beside them, the two girls were seated in the colonel's private room.

"Before we waste time in explanations," said Marco—as we will continue to call her—"it is my duty to inform you that there is a large force of Confederates surrounding the city."

Scouts were immediately sent out in all directions with instructions to report without delay.

When once more at leisure, the colonel again turned to Marco.

"Tell me all that you know concerning this chain and locket," he demanded. "We will speak of yourself later."

"I have already told you all," replied Marco.

"Young ladies," he said finally, "there is a long and sad story connected with this locket and chain. It belonged to my dearest friend, who long ago disappeared, but whether or not he is dead, I cannot say. Yet, it must be so—it must be so."

"Did he have it with him when you last saw him?" asked Marco.

"Yes, and no," replied the colonel. "His daughter, who was then but little more than a babe, had been stolen. We were searching for her. Her son, then just a lad, was then with us."

"Go on."

"Mayhew and I——"

"Mayhew! Did you say Mayhew?" cried Marco.

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Nothing—nothing!" she murmured. "Pray continue."

"Mayhew and I had just found a very rich mine, only a few weeks before, and fearful that something might happen to us, he had sewed a chart of the caverns in the little one's dress."

"Her name! What was her name?" asked Marco.

"Her name was Lorna. But why are you so agitated?"

"Your story excites me. Pray continue."

"We went to the mine for a few days, and when we returned the child had disappeared. She had no mother, and was in the care of an old Indian squaw whose name was——"

"Was it Lanah?" asked Marco breathlessly.

"Yes, yes, that was it! But how did you know?"

"Please go on," was all that Lorna replied.

"Lanah had also disappeared. We could account for it in no way but that the father had been seen to conceal the chart in the child's clothing and that she had been stolen for that reason."

"Mayhew was crazed at the thought. He could not forgive himself. He became almost insane. I thought at times quite so."

"At last he declared his intention of starting in search of her, and I did not try to dissuade him. His son, Paul, went with him."

"Just before leaving me, Mayhew unclasped this chain from his neck and, extending it, requested me to carefully examine it."

"I did so."

"Harrison," said he, as I handed it back to him, 'I wish you would make me a promise before I go.'

"Willingly," I replied.

"We have found wealth enough to last us and our descendants forever," he continued; "that is, I have found it and revealed it to you; we are partners."

"I assented, and he continued:

"Promise me that you will never work the mine, or, indeed, visit it, until Paul or I shall return to you, or until I shall have found a means of sending you this chain and locket."

"I feel the weight of a presentiment upon me. Not that I am going to my death, but that in some way the store of wealth which we have found will bring a curse with it."

"Old fellow, I think too much of you to have the curse fall upon your head also. Let me, then, test it. Will you promise?"

"I gave the promise, and he added:

"I am not going to die, Harrison, but something is going to happen. What, I do not know. If I should send the chain and locket to you, I beg that you will at once carry out any request which may come with it, no matter what it may be."

"I promised, and he left me, taking Paul with him. I have never seen or heard of either of them since that night until to-night, when you placed the trinket in my hand."

"Can you wonder that I was startled?"

"Fifteen years have passed since then. Fortune has had many reverses for me. Ups and downs were the rule until I joined the army. I have been hungry, starving, in dire want, and yet I have never once gone to that cave in the mountains where lie, securely hidden, millions which I might have had for the taking."

"Is Roland Mayhew dead?" I have asked myself a thousand times. Is Paul dead? and now I am confronted with a new question."

"What is that, sir?"

"This: Can it be that Silver Sam of Santa Fe is in reality Paul Mayhew?—and have I so wronged the son of my best friend as to outlaw him? And this child here, whom you call Ilda, and who is, you say, the sister of Silver Sam—can it be that she is Lorna?"

The colonel almost broke down under the weight of his emotions, but Marco quickly sprang to her feet, and threw herself upon her knees in front of him.

"No," she cried. "But I can tell you where Lorna is now."

"Where—where?" exclaimed the colonel.

"Here!" replied Marco. "I am Lorna Mayhew—I know it now."

"You!" cried the officer. "Why you but now said you were Inez Sepulvida."

"Aye, and I spoke truly. There is a mystery which I cannot explain now. See!" and she drew forth the chart which she had used in the cave. "Lanah was with me until a few years ago. She always kept one of my childish dresses about her. When she was dying she gave it to me, and told me that there was a paper concealed in the lining which I must always keep and guard."

"She would have said more, but she died before should could speak again, and I was left in ignorance."

The colonel bowed his head and thought long and deeply.

"I see it all now," he said at last. "I see it all. Oh, if only I could have understood it long ago. Your father! Do you know aught of him?"

"Nothing."

"Nor your brother?"

"Nothing."

"May it not be that Silver Sam is Paul, after all?"

"Oh, no, no, no!"

A loud rap at the door interrupted her.

The colonel went out, but presently he returned.

"The scouts have reported," he said. "The Confederate force is very much larger than ours. It would be a wanton sacrifice of my men to remain here and attempt to defend Santa Fe against them."

"What, then, will you do?" asked Marco and Ilda in one breath.

The colonel smiled.

"Child," he said, "this locket has opened to me a safe retreat. I will take my command to the canyons and caves I spoke of. There the rebels cannot pursue us, and from there we can harass them until they will be glad to once more abandon Santa Fe into my hands."

"Come, you have brought me a timely warning and a safe refuge for my soldiers. The retreat must begin at once; we must leave here before dawn. I have already given the necessary orders. Come!"

In a short time the entire command was in the saddle, and quietly evacuating the city of Santa Fe.

But the city marshal, who was at heart a Confederate, had, unknown to anybody, mounted his horse and fled.

At the very moment when Colonel Harrison and his men were quietly leaving the city, the treacherous marshal was in conversation with the Confederate brigadier, and five minutes later the whole force of rebel soldiers were on their way to intercept the colonel in his retreat.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MIDNIGHT CHARGE.

The colonel rode at the head of his troop, and on his right rode Marco; on his left, Ilda.

On either side of the sister of Silver Sam trotted the lions, at all times watchful over the safety of their well-beloved mistress.

Ever and anon a flash of lightning, lurid and vivid, would light up the whole scene for the fraction of an instant, leaving the world thereafter more densely dark than before.

They traversed a mile or more without incident, when suddenly by one of the flashes the gallant colonel saw a compact body of horsemen drawn up in line directly in the path of their advance.

"Betrayed!" he muttered, and instantly passed the word back to halt.

"Young ladies," he said, rapidly, "we are hemmed in, and the only thing for us to do is to charge through the line which is there to intercept us. There is no help for it; therefore, go to the rear and follow."

They complied.

"Charge!" rang out the bugle-like voice of the brave colonel, and instantly the entire command dashed ahead like an avalanche.

On they flew in that terrible midnight charge, with the darkness so intense that they could not see their own comrades riding next to them, let alone the enemy upon whom they were sweeping.

"Ready! Fire!" came the next order, as they swept onward.

A sheet of flame and the rattle of their carbines told how well the order was obeyed.

But they never slackened their pace.

An answering volley came quickly from the Confederate lines, but most of the bullets flew wide of the mark, and therefore did but little damage.

Then came the crash, as the two bodies of horsemen met.

It was terrible.

From the instant when the first order to charge was given until the moment when nothing could be heard but the stamping and clattering of horses' hoofs and the groans of the wounded the time was very short.

There had been the avalanche-like charge; the volley from the carbines; the loud and terrible crash as the opposing forces met; a wild cheer from the Union men, and the fight was over.

How many brave fellows had been left upon the field never to rise again, none could say until upon the following day when the muster roll should be called, and the troop would hear the solemn tones of the sergeants as they replied for many names in their companies by the one word, "missing."

On they dashed.

For the Confederates to attempt to pursue was folly, and none knew it better than they.

Ten minutes later Colonel Harrison again gave the order to halt.

Then in that impenetrable darkness he formed his men once

more, and himself rode back over the line in search of Marco and Ilda.

Would he find them?

"Who could say?"

His heart quaked as he thought of the possibilities of that charge to them.

Had he only found Lorna Mayhew to lose her?

Eagerly he searched, but without avail.

The girls were missing.

"Men," he called, raising his voice, "when we started there were with us two young ladies. They are missing. It may be that they fell in the battle, and it may be that they are prisoners in the hands of the enemy. The latter is probably the case, and in the morning I shall call for volunteers to follow me to their rescue.

"There will be no compulsion in this service, for we may all go to our death, but, men, your colonel will go if he has to go alone."

A wild cheer was the response to his words, and from every side rang out the cry:

"I—and I—and I—and I!"

With a burst of pride at the gallantry of his men, the colonel thanked them, and then gave the order to ride on.

Dawn was just breaking as they drew near the mouth of the Little Canyon, and there, feeling that they were free from pursuit and that a place of sure refuge and retreat was within easy reach, the troops dismounted and staked out their horses.

But scarcely were they quartered, when one and all set up a wild shout of joy.

Far away to the northward were two horses galloping with all speed towards them, and even at that distance they recognized the figures of Marco and Ilda.

But why were they galloping so madly?

A second glance told the reason, for over a rise in the ground came a squad of Confederate cavalry in pursuit.

"To horse! To horse!" cried the soldiers, forgetting discipline for once, and not awaiting the command of their officer.

In an instant they had leaped upon the backs of their tired steeds.

The next instant they were away, dashing like mad over the plains.

The Confederates saw them and hesitated. Then they halted, and seeing that they were greatly outnumbered turned and fled.

But the blood of the boys in blue was up.

They did not pause. They dashed on past the girls, spreading out until they formed a semi-circle, and keeping up the chase for the Confeds.

Aye, and they caught them, too, for the fugitives, seeing that there was no such thing as escape for them, halted and surrendered.

In triumph, the boys in blue returned to their camp.

They had caught a prize, for foremost in pursuit of the girls had been the traitor marshal.

His looks were sullen and frightened. He well knew there was no such thing as mercy for him.

Colonel Harrison looked upon him coldly, but without pity.

To his stern and unrelenting sense of justice there could be but one fate for a traitor.

He issued his orders coldly, notwithstanding the entreaties and loud appeals for mercy which the marshal made, he saw that there was no forgiveness for him.

"Your treachery cost us many lives," said the colonel coldly, "and your own is certainly forfeited."

The traitor was led out upon the plain.

A file of soldiers were drawn up in line thirty paces away.

Their carbines were leveled at the heart of the unprincipled marshal.

The word was given, the carbines were discharged, and the marshal sank to the earth to rise no more.

So ended the life of a traitor.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RED DEMON AGAIN.

Three days passed, and during that time the colonel, with Marco and Ilda at his side, and accompanied by the lions, had searched for some trace of Silver Sam.

But their quest had been fruitless.

At last, having heard all the particulars which Marco and Ilda could give him, Colonel Harrison resolved to take his men through the fissure and attack the Crimson League in their stronghold.

Although many years had elapsed since the colonel had been upon that ground, he remembered it as perfectly as though it had been but the day before.

Every by-path, every grotto and cave and corridor and crevice in the mountains was as perfectly familiar to him as the streets of Santa Fe, and he led his men through the fissure without a moment's hesitation.

But the victory was an easy one.

Not a man opposed their progress; not one sign of life did they find.

The Crimson League had disappeared as entirely as though the earth had swallowed it.

Around the rooms of their cavern were scattered the signs of a hasty departure.

Everything of value was missing.

The explanation to the mind of the colonel was easy, but this was not the right one, as the reader knows.

He thought that the outlaws, knowing of the proximity of himself and his men, and believing that their retreat had been discovered, had fled.

The real reason was this:

Fully a third of the prosperous band of outlaws, robbers, and murderers were imprisoned, with their chief, in the treasureroom of the cave, where Red Beard had fastened them.

The remaining two-thirds had deserted.

When no sign of their companions in crime could be discovered, those remaining were struck with terror.

They decided at once to quit.

Having met together they counted out the gains which their life of crime and pillage had brought to them, and having divided it, had agreed that each one should set out in a different direction.

Thus was the band scattered, and so little confidence and faith had they in one another that they preferred going alone to risking their lives and their booty in the company of their own comrades.

Thus it was that Colonel Harrison and his men found the cave deserted.

Having assured himself of the fact, he brought his own men into the little valley where they located their camp for the time.

Another day passed, and still another, and all were satisfied that Silver Sam could not be found.

"Could it be that he had been buried alive in the cave?" the colonel asked himself many times.

He well knew that the only part which was shut against him was the treasure room.

"Had Silver Sam been left there to die?" he wondered.

Many times he thought of blasting open the rock which formed the barrier, but knowing so well the character of the corridors and tunnels of that hollow mountain, he was fearful of the possible consequences of such an act.

However, on the sixth morning his resolution was taken.

He could wait no longer, and he resolved to blast the rock.

After due preparation he started with a few of his men to lay the mine, but as they were about to enter the cave an apparition suddenly impeded their progress.

It was the figure of Red Beard.

He stood there, just in the entrance, with folded arms, as though awaiting them.

He neither moved nor spoke, but the effect which the mere sight of the man had upon Colonel Harrison was startling.

With a loud cry of joy he dashed forward.

"Mayhew—Ronald Mayhew!" he cried. "Great God, have I been permitted to find my old friend alive!"

Red Beard passed his hand absently across his head. A light of half recognition burned in his eyes.

"Ronald—Ronald! Don't you know me?" cried the colonel. "I am Harrison, your old friend, and, Ronald, I have found your daughter. I have found Lorna."

Those words acted like magic upon the clouded mind.

In an instant he recognized his old friend; the mind which had been clouded for so long—but which during the past few days had been clearing a little—had suddenly become as bright as ever.

His great muscular arms were suddenly stretched forth as he grasped the colonel by either shoulder, and looked steadily into his eyes.

"Thank God!" he said hoarsely. "Thank God that I live again, for I have been dead—dead! How many long years has this madness been upon me? See, you have grown gray in the time; not much, but you are older—I can see that, and I—what am I? I have become a monster—a beast. Yet now I live again! Thank God! Thank God! And Lorna! You have found her?"

"Yes."

"She lives."

"Yes."

"And is well?"

"Yes. I will take you to her."

"No, no. Not now. I would not have her see me thus. My boy—my Paul. Where is he?"

The colonel shook his head.

"I do not know," he replied sadly. "I fear that he is dead. There is but one person to whom we can look for information, and he may not possess it. I cannot say. More, he may be dead. Nay, I believe him to be shut up in the treasure-room. See; it was he who sent me this."

The colonel held up the chain and locket.

The long, muscular arms of Ronald Mayhew were stretched out quickly, and he seized the chain in his right hand.

"Yes, it is mine!" he cried. "It is the same one that I gave to my boy, telling him to take it to you. And you have but just received it?"

The colonel bowed.

"And from whom?"

"From Lorna. It was to her that Silver Sam gave it to bring to me."

"Silver Sam!"

Ronald Mayhew started back and pressed his hands to his head.

For a moment he was silent. Then, seizing the colonel by the arm, he drew him quickly aside.

"Send your men back and come with me," he said.

The colonel acquiesced, and in a moment more he was following his guide through the winding tunnel of the old mine.

They continued in the main passage-way until nearly to the opening which communicated with the treasure room when, stooping suddenly, Mayhew raised a concealed trap in the floor.

The trap opened into another and narrower passage-way, which led downward for a short distance, ending at the foot of a long and steep flight of steps cut in the rock.

Mounting quickly, they presently emerged into a room which the colonel knew to be directly over the treasure room.

A light was quickly procured, and there, chained to the wall, was Silver Sam.

He was perfectly well, but a close prisoner.

He gave a glad cry of welcome when he recognized the colonel, for he knew that he was to be liberated.

Mayhew went directly to his prisoner, and in an instant had freed him from his bonds.

"Silver Sam," he said, "I have been mad—mad! But now I am sane again. My name is Mayhew—Ronald Mayhew. Can you tell me aught of my son Paul?"

"You Mr. Mayhew!" cried Sam. "You!"

"Yes, I. I have been mad, but now I am sane. Where is Paul? Tell me the worst. Is he dead?"

Silver Sam bowed his head.

"Tell me about it," said the father.

"It is quickly told," replied Sam. "For many years he was kept a prisoner by your common enemy, my uncle—the man whom you know as Captain Flash, who Colonel Harrison knows as Albert Belknap, but whose real name is Albert Belton."

"Both men expressed their astonishment, and Mayhew said feverishly:

"Go on."

"At last," continued Silver Sam, "after many years he succeeded in escaping. That was four years ago. He was pursued, and in his flight met me. By reason of my knowledge of the country we eluded his pursuers.

"For a year we remained together as partners, but his long imprisonment had broken his health, and at last he died.

"Upon his deathbed he told me the story of your adversity and his, and gave me the chain and locket, which he had succeeded in preserving.

"From him I learned the secret of this cave. I learned also that my uncle was the enemy who had been your curse.

"I swore to him that I would find his sister if she lived. You he believed to be dead.

"In carrying out his wishes I sought to capture my unnatural uncle alive, and thus force him to tell me all that he knew, but I could not succeed.

"You have captured him, for he is in the room below. Captain Flash and he are one and the same.

"It was he who stole Lorna, but the old Indian woman outwitted him, I believe, for unless I am greatly mistaken, Inez Sepulvida is your daughter Lorna.

"Flash suspected it, but was not certain. If I am right your daughter will tell you the rest of the story better than I can."

"Sam," said the colonel, stepping forward, "can you forgive me?"

"Entirely, colonel. You were deceived, that is all. Flash knew that I was on his track. He feared me. He knew also that the secret of this mine was in your possession. For that reason he sought your life as he sought the life of everybody who stood in his way. His warning was only a ruse as well as a plot to get me out of the way."

The colonel was greatly moved.

"Come," he said. "Let us now return to Lorna."

"Wait," said Mayhew. "Let us first take a look at our prisoners. By this time they must be starved out."

He went to the trap door and raised it.

As he did so there was a loud report, and Ronald Mayhew sank back upon the floor senseless.

The bullet from beneath had gone true to its aim.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

There is but little more to tell.

The shot which had been fired from the treasure room was from a pistol in the hand of Captain Flash.

He laughed long and loudly when he saw the effect of his shot.

"At last!" he cried. "For hours and hours I have stood here with my pistol aimed at that trap. I knew that it would open sooner or later, and when it did I fired. I have survived them all. They have fought down here until I am the only one left alive.

"See. I have another shot left. It is for myself. I know that you want to hang me, but I will cheat you."

Then a second flash and report, and the captain of the Crimson League was dead by his own hand.

What he said was true.

Shut up as they had been in that treasure room, they had turned upon each other and fought, and now not one was left alive.

Closing the trap, the colonel and Sam bore their new found friend out of the cave into the land-locked valley, and there they laid him upon the grass and sent for Lorna.

She came quickly, and was told that the man was her father.

She fell upon her knees by his side, and presently he opened his eyes.

"Father! Father!" she cried. "Do you know me?"

"Yes, child, thank God!"

She wept convulsively.

"Live, my father!" she cried, "or I will think it is I who have killed you."

"You, my child!"

"Yes, I. It was my bullet that struck you there," and she pointed to the wound upon his forehead.

"Was it?" cried the dying man. "I am glad of that, Lorna. If I had not received that wound I believe that I would have died a madman. See, it was only a scratch, but it struck me a sharp blow, and ever since that moment my mind has been getting clearer.

"Lorna, you should thank God that you fired it, because if you had not you would never have known your father. It is you, child, who have saved me from dying as I have lived—a madman."

He could speak no more except to murmur a blessing upon her, and with his head pillowed upon the bosom of his long-lost child, Ronald Mayhew breathed his last.

They buried him there in the valley near where he had lived so long.

The story concerning the confusion of Lorna's identity with Inez Sepulvida, was learned later.

* * * * *

A word more, and our story is told.

The mine of great wealth is a secret still.

Its existence is known only to the colonel and Lorna, and to Silver Sam and his sister.

The millions of dollars in silver that were hidden there are there now.

The knowledge of the existence of the treasure chamber, and the search for it, has brought nothing but curses and unhappiness.

None of our friends could find it in their hearts to again penetrate the depths of that old Spanish mine, still less to take from it the wealth which seemed fated to bring naught but sorrow upon whomsoever thought to possess himself of it.

The treasure room has become a sepulcher, and the ghosts of many victims haunt the corridors which lead to it.

The watchword thereof is death, and whosoever dares to brave the curse which the old Spanish miners put upon it, let him breathe the watchword and enter.

Silver Sam of Santa Fe is now a man well advanced in years.

Lorna became his wife, and they have four sons, now grown to manhood.

None of them suspect the existence of the Cave of the Lions, and their parents fervently hope that they never will.

The reader will forgive me for not telling the true name of Silver Sam, for neither he nor the colonel would care to have it known.

Ilda lives still, and is a happy wife and mother.

The lions, Brutus and Cassius, are long since dead.

But they were faithful and constant to the last.

Always docile, ever obedient, their ferocity when injury threatened their beloved owners, was always the same.

Reader, the story is told, and all that is now left for me to write is

THE END.

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